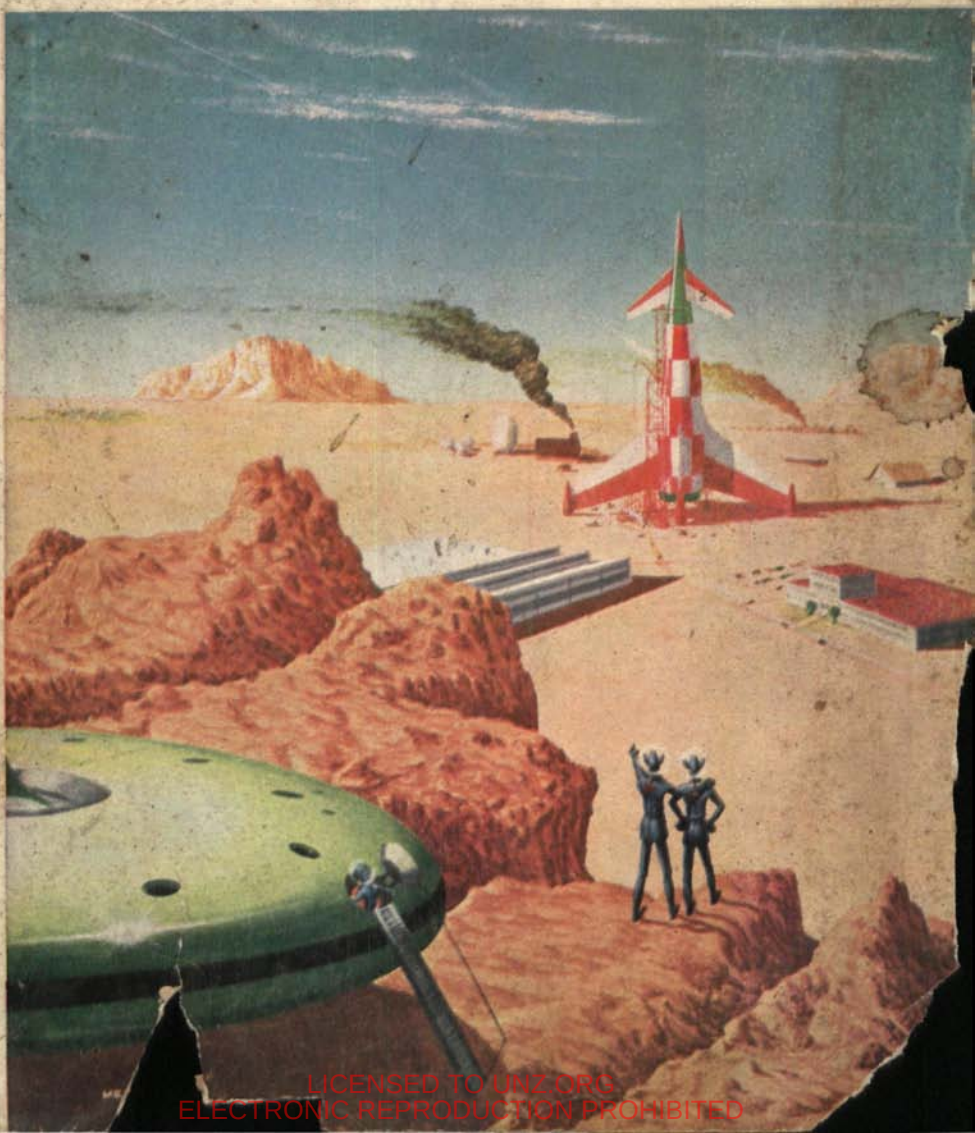
# Galaxy
## SCIENCE FICTION

OCTOBER 1954

35¢

SPY

By J. T. McIntosh



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OCTOBER, 1954 VOL. 9, NO. 1

# Galaxy
## SCIENCE FICTION

ALL ORIGINAL STORIES • NO REPRINTS!

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Cover by HUNTER Showing THE LASTEST IN DUGOUT CANOES


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# TAKE MY WORD

NYORK or New York? Rxzl or Jones? Whether to pick current nomenclature or exotic place and personal names is one of the most vexing problems in writing science fiction. Hostile reviewers are fond of jibing at this vulnerable point. Instead of jibing right back at their erudite ignorance, I'll simply prescribe *The Story of Language* by Mario Pei, published by Lippincott, for them. A good, hard look at this fine study—having been a reviewer myself, I know that good, hard looks are rare in the breed—should indicate that language change is a legitimate field of speculation and the chance that today's recognizable names will remain the same indefinitely is a bad betting proposition.

Why, there is even an imposing term for the science—toponomy, the study of place names. The U. S. Department of the Interior has a bureau of linguists whose job is to hunt down the origins and meanings of the names of states, cities, mountains, rivers, lakes and so forth. It's a rough task, for many of the names have come down in unrecognizable form and the meanings lost.

According to Mr. Pei, Tennessee is "the vines of the big bend," Iowa "the sleepy ones," Oklahoma "the red people," Kansas "a breeze near the ground," Michigan "fish-catching place," Kentucky "the dark and bloody ground," Illinois "the tribe of perfect men," Texas "Friends!" and Idaho "good morning!" Chicago comes from the Piankashaw Indian Chi-Kak-Quwa, "place of skunk smells," because wild onions grew there.

Well, why not Nyork or even Nyawk? Look at what happened to Lugdunum, which is now Lyon; Cameracum and Mediolanum, the latter meaning "in the middle of the plain," time-abbreviated to Cambrai and Milan. Caesarea Augusta became the Spanish Zaragoza; the first name (Caesarea) is now rendered in English and French as Jersey.

If many names sound nonsensical in science fiction, they can't approach reality for sheer incredibility. I've already mentioned Torpenhow Hill in England, each syllable of which has the same meaning, added by invaders or settlers, all translating to Hillhillhill Hill! Our Greenwich Village is almost as bad, for *-wich* is from the Latin *vicus,* meaning "village." The Sicilian town of Linguaglossa is "tongue-tongue" in Latin and Greek. And imagine the disbelief of local Indians if



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they ever learned that their uncomprehending "What do you say?" to queries about the name of their country has come down to us as Yucatan!

Given time, the origin of the town named Baseball, Ohio, is bound to be lost, perhaps even to linguists. The two communities of Basil and Baltimore decided to merge, with each contributing its first syllable to the joint monicker.

If one thing is certain, it is that language shifts will make the most absurd-seeming invented place names of science fiction, now ridiculed by reviewers who refuse to budge off the flypaper of the immediate moment, sound like timid guesses. Brimaquonx was once seriously suggested—and not in science fiction—as a name for New York that would combine those of all the boroughs. The future name may make that seem reasonable and even attractive.

For that matter, even in the present, how many of us would recognize the Chinese Mei Kuo as America or the Serbo-Croatian Zdedinjene Drzave as the United States?

Personal names are not apt to fare better, especially when occupations, which have always been used as designations, change from our Smith, Baker, Miller and such to Jetman, Radar, Astronaut and Lord knows what else.

To compound the confusion, nicknames have a nasty habit of becoming names. Remember Marcus Tullius? Certainly not. You know him as Cicero, Latin for "chickpea," bestowed on him because of a wart on the nose!

Don't be surprised if Gimpy, Baldy, Red, Toots and the like become actual names. They have present-day equivalents in Claude (L., "lame"), Calvin (L., "bald"), Priscilla (L., "somewhat old"), Gretta (It., "petty"), Mona (Sp., "she-monkey").

Names can also be so truncated that they bear no likeness whatever to their origins. Dino, a popular Italian name, is all that remains of Aldobrandino, Germanic for "old sword." Ted, Ed, Bill, Jim and the rest have an equally good chance of surviving as full names.

As for origins, industry is unwittingly making a contribution. A number of Amazonian girls are called Frigidaire. And in Nyassaland, Africa, the chief of a tribe took his name—Oxford University Press—from a publisher's catalogue.

Rxzl, mentioned earlier, does sound unlikely because of its lack of vowels. But if the Yugoslavs can call Trieste *Trst* and "a hill full of fog" in Czech comes out *vrch pln mlh*, why not Rxzl?

—H. L. GOLD



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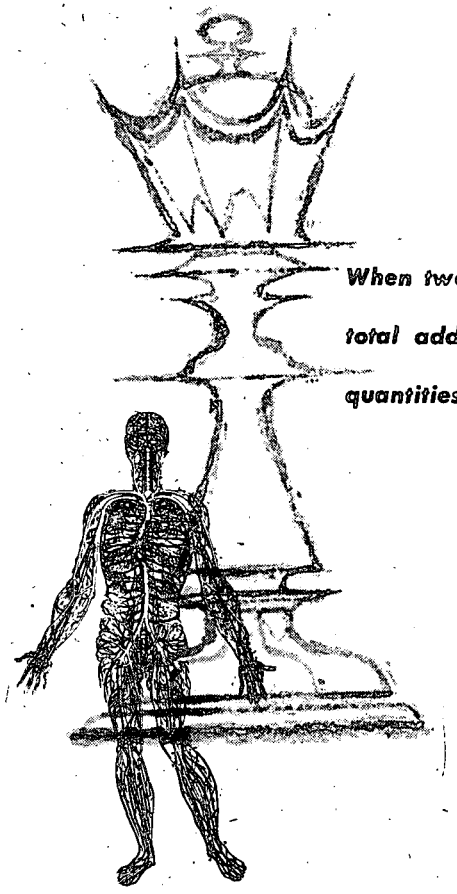
# A World of Talent

By PHILIP K. DICK



*When two and two equal all or nothing, the total adds up to trouble — especially if the quantities you are dealing with are people!*

Illustrated by KOSSIN

WHEN he entered the apartment, a great number of people were making noises and flashing colors. The sudden cacophony confused him. Aware of the surge of shapes, sounds, smells, three-dimensional oblique patches, but trying to peer through and beyond, he halted at the door. With an act of will, he was able to clear



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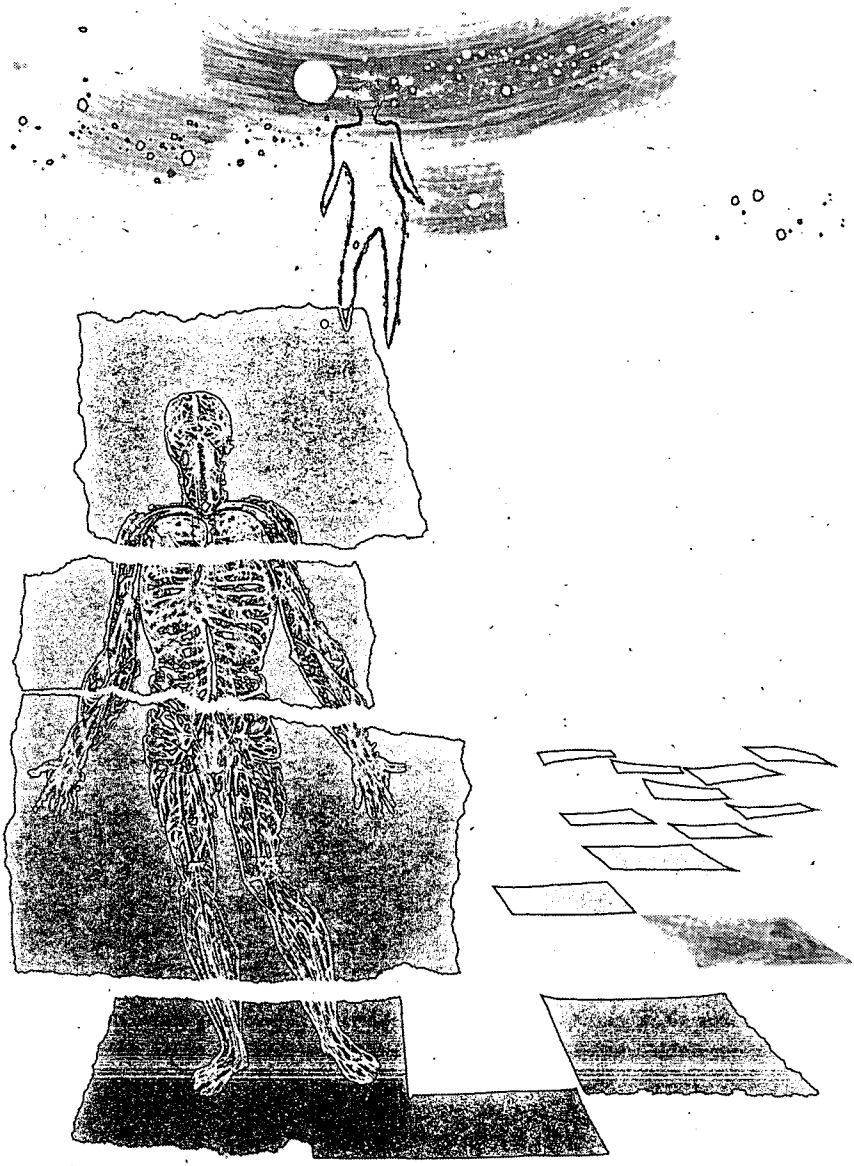



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the blur somewhat; the meaningless frenzy of human activity settled gradually into a quasi-orderly pattern.

"What's the matter?" his father asked sharply.

"This is what we previewed a half-hour ago," his mother said when the eight-year-old boy failed to answer. "I wish you'd let me get a Corpsman to probe him."

"I don't fully trust the Corps. And we have twelve years to handle this ourselves. If we haven't cracked it by then—"

"Later." She bent down and ordered in a crisp tone, "Go on in, Tim. Say hello to people."

"Try to hold an objective orientation," his father added gently. "At least for this evening, to the end of the party."

Tim passed silently through the crowded living room, ignoring the various oblique shapes, his body tilted forward, head turned to one side. Neither of his parents followed him; they were intercepted by the host and then surrounded by Norm and Psi guests.

In the melee, the boy was forgotten. He made a brief circuit of the living room, satisfied himself that nothing existed there, and then sought a side hall. A mechanical attendant opened a bedroom door for him and he entered.

THE bedroom was deserted; the party had only begun. He allowed the voices and movement behind him to fade into an indiscriminate blur. Faint perfumes of women drifted through the swank apartment, carried by the warm, Terranlike, artificial air pumped from the central ducts of the city. He raised himself up and inhaled the sweet scents, flowers, fruits, spices — and something more.

He had to go all the way into the bedroom to isolate it. There it was—sour, like spoiled milk—the warning he counted on. And it *was* in the bedroom.

Cautiously, he opened a closet. The mechanical selector tried to present him with clothing, but he ignored it. With the closet open, the scent was stronger. The Other was somewhere near the closet, if not actually in it.

Under the bed?

He crouched down and peered. Not there. He lay outstretched and stared under Fairchild's metal work-desk, typical furniture of a Colonial official's quarters. Here, the scent was stronger. Fear and excitement touched him. He jumped to his feet and pushed the desk away from the smooth plastic surface of the wall.

The Other clung against the wall in the dark shadows where the desk had rested.



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It was a Right Other, of course. He had only identified one Left and that for no more than a split second. The Other hadn't managed to phase totally. He retreated warily from it, conscious that, without his cooperation, it had come as far as it could. The Other watched him calmly, aware of his negative actions, but there was little it could do. It made no attempt to communicate, for that had always failed.

TIM was safe. He halted and spent a long moment scrutinizing the Other. This was his chance to learn more about it. A space separated the two of them, across which only the visual image and odor—small vaporized particles—of the Other crossed.

It was not possible to identify this Other; many were so similar, they appeared to be multiples of the same unit. But sometimes the Other was radically different. Was it possible that various selections were being tried, alternate attempts to get across?

Again the thought struck him. The people in the living room, both Norm and Psi classes—and even the Mute-class of which he was a part — seemed to have reached a workable stalemate with their own Others. It was strange, since their Lefts would be advanced over his own . . . unless the procession of Rights diminished as the Left group increased.

Was there a finite total of Others?

He went back to the frenetic living room. People murmured and swirled on all sides, gaudy opaque shapes everywhere, warm smells overpowering him with their closeness. It was clear that he would have to get information from his mother and father. He had already spun the research indices hooked to the Sol System educational transmission — spun them without results, since the circuit was not working.

"Where did you wander off to?" his mother asked him, pausing in the animated conversation that had grown up among a group of Norm-class officials blocking one side of the room. She caught the expression on his face.

"Oh," she said. "Even here?"

He was surprised at her question. Location made no difference. Didn't she know that? Floundering, he withdrew into himself to consider. He needed help; he couldn't understand without outside assistance. But a staggering verbal block existed. Was it only a problem of terminology or was it more?

As he wandered around the living room, the vague musty odor filtered to him through the heavy



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curtain of people-smells. The Other was still there, crouched in the darkness where the desk had been, in the shadows of the deserted bedroom. Waiting to come over. Waiting for him to take two more steps.

JULIE watched her eight-year-old son move away, an expression of concern on her petite face. "We'll have to keep our eyes on him," she said to her husband. "I preview a mounting situation built around this thing of his."

Curt had caught it, too, but he kept on talking to the Norm-class officials grouped around the two Precogs. "What would you do," he demanded, "if they really opened up on us? You know Big Noodle can't handle a stepped-up shower of robot projectiles. The handful now and then are in the nature of experiments . . . and he has the half-hour warnings from Julie and me."

"True." Fairchild scratched his gray nose, rubbed the stubble of beard showing below his lip. "But I don't think they'll swing to overt war operations. It would be an admission that we're getting somewhere. It would legalize us and open things up. We might collect you Psi-class people together and—" he grinned wearily —"and think the Sol Systems far out past the Andromache Nebula."

CURT listened without resentment, since the man's words were no surprise. As he and Julie had driven over, they had both previewed the party, its unfruitful discussions, the growing aberrations of their son. His wife's precog span was somewhat greater than his own. She was seeing, at this moment, ahead of his own vision. He wondered what the worried expression on her face indicated.

"I'm afraid," Julie said tightly, "that we're going to have a little quarrel before we get home tonight."

Well, he had also seen that. "It's the situation," he said, rejecting the topic. "Everybody here is on edge. It isn't only you and I who're going to be fighting."

Fairchild listened sympathetically. "I can see some drawbacks to being a Precog. But knowing you're going to have a spat, can't you alter things before it begins?"

"Sure," Curt answered, "the way we give you pre-information and you use it to alter the situation with Terra. But neither Julie nor I particularly care. It takes a huge mental effort to stave off something like this . . . and neither of us has that much energy."

"I just wish you'd let me turn him over to the Corps," Julie said in a low voice. "I can't stand



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him wandering around, peering under things, looking in closets for God knows what!"

"For Others," Curt said.

"Whatever that might be."

Fairchild, a natural-born moderator, tried intercession. "You've got twelve years," he began. "It's no disgrace to have Tim stay in the Mute-class; every one of you starts out that way. If he has Psi powers, he'll show."

"You talk like an infinite Precog," Julie said, amused. "How do you know they'll show?"

Fairchild's good-natured face twisted with effort. Curt felt sorry for him. Fairchild had too much responsibility, too many decisions to make, too many lives on his hands. Before the Separation with Terra, he had been an appointed official, a bureaucrat with a job and clearly defined routine. Now there was nobody to tap out an inter-system memo to him early Monday morning. Fairchild was working without instructions.

"Let's see that doodad of yours," Curt said. "I'm curious about how it works."

Fairchild was astonished. "How the hell—" Then he remembered. "Sure, you must have already previewed it." He dug around in his coat. "I was going to make it the surprise of the party, but we can't have surprises with you two Precogs around."

The other Norm-class officials crowded around as their boss unwrapped a square of tissue paper and from it lifted a small glittering stone. An interested silence settled over the room as Fairchild examined the stone, his eyes close to it, like a jeweler studying a precious gem.

"An ingenious thing," Curt admitted.

"Thanks," Fairchild said. "They should start arriving any day, now. The glitter is to attract children and lower-class people who would go out for a bauble—possible wealth, you know. And women, of course. Anybody who would stop and pick up what they thought was a diamond, everybody but the Tech-classes. I'll show you."

HE glanced around the hushed living room at the guests in their gay party clothes. Off to one side, Tim stood with his head turned at an angle. Fairchild hesitated, then tossed the stone across the carpet in front of the boy, almost at his feet. The boy's eyes didn't flicker. He was gazing absently through the people, unaware of the bright object at his feet.

Curt moved forward, ready to take up the social slack. "You'd have to produce something the size of a jet transport." He bent down and retrieved the stone. "It's not your fault that Tim



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doesn't respond to such mundane things as fifty-carat diamonds."

Fairchild was crestfallen at the collapse of his demonstration. "I forgot." He brightened. "But there aren't any Mutes on Terra any more. Listen and see what you think of the spiel. I had a hand at writing it."

IN Curt's hand, the stone rested coldly. In his ears, a tiny gnatlike buzz sounded, a controlled, modulated cadence that caused a stir of murmurs around the room.

"My friends," the canned voice stated, "the causes of the conflict between Terra and the Centaurian colonies have been grossly misstated in the press."

"Is this seriously aimed at children?" Julie asked.

"Maybe he thinks Terran children are advanced over our own," a Psi-class official said as a rustle of amusement drifted through the room.

The tinny whine droned on, turning out its mixture of legalistic arguments, idealism and an almost pathetic pleading. The begging quality grated on Curt. Why did Fairchild have to get down on his knees and plead with the Terrans? As he listened, Fairchild puffed confidently on his pipe, arms folded, heavy face thick with satisfaction. Evidently Fairchild wasn't aware of the precarious *thinness* of his canned words.

It occurred to Curt that none of them—including himself—was facing how really fragile their Separation movement was. There was no use blaming the weak words wheezing from the pseudogem. Any description of their position was bound to reflect the querulous half-fear that dominated the Colonies.

"It has long been established," the stone asserted, "that freedom is the natural condition of Man. Servitude, the bondage of one man or one group of men to another, is a remnant of the past, a vicious anachronism. Men must govern themselves."

"Strange to hear a stone saying that," Julie said, half-amused. "An inert lump of rock."

"You have been told that the Colonial Secessionist movement will jeopardize your System, your lives and your standard of living. *This is not true.* The standard of living of all mankind will be raised if the colony planets are allowed to govern themselves and find their own economic markets. The mercantile system practiced by the Terran government on Terrans living outside the Sol group—"

"The children will bring this thing home," Fairchild said. "The parents will pick it up from them."



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THE stone droned on. "The Colonies could not remain mere supply bases for Terra, sources of raw materials and cheap labor. The Colonists could not remain second-class citizens. Colonists have as much right to determine their own society as those remaining in the Sol group. Thus, the Colonial Government has petitioned the Terran Government for a severance of those bonds to keep us from realizing our manifest destinies."

Curt and Julie exchanged glances. The academic textbook dissertation hung like a dead weight in the room. Was this the man the Colony had elected to manage the resistance movement? A pedant, a salaried official, a bureaucrat and — Curt couldn't help thinking — a man without Psi powers. A Normal.

Fairchild had probably been moved to break with Terra over some trivial miswording of a routine directive. Nobody, except perhaps the telepathic Corps, knew his motives or how long he could keep going.

"What do you think of it?" Fairchild asked when the stone had finished its monologue and had started over. "Millions of them showering down all over the Sol group. You know what the Terran press is saying about us —vicious lies—that we want to take over Sol, that we're hideous invaders from outer space, monsters, mutants, freaks. We have to counter such propaganda."

"Well," Julie said, "a third of us *are* freaks, so why not face it? I know my son is a useless freak."

Curt took her arm. "Nobody's calling Tim a freak, not even you!"

"But it's true!" She pulled away. "If we were back in the Sol System—if we hadn't separated—you and I would be in detention camps, waiting to be —you know." She fiercely jabbed in the direction of their son. "There wouldn't be any Tim."

From the corner a sharp-faced man spoke up. "We wouldn't be in the Sol System. We'd have broken out on our own without anybody's help. Fairchild had nothing to do with it; we brought him along. Don't ever forget that!"

Curt eyed the man hostilely. Reynolds, chief of the telepathic Corps, was drunk again. Drunk and spilling over his load of vitriolic hate for Norms.

"Possibly," Curt agreed, "but we would have had a hell of a time doing it."

"You and I know what keeps this Colony alive," Reynolds answered, his flushed face arrogant and sneering. "How long could these bureaucrats keep on going without Big Noodle and Sally, you two Precogs, the Corps and


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all the rest of us? Face facts—we don't need this legalistic window-dressing. We're not going to win because of any pious appeals for freedom and equality. We're going to win because there are no Psis on Terra."

THE geniality of the room dwindled. Angry murmurs rose from the Norm-class guests.

"Look here," Fairchild said to Reynolds, "you're still a human being, even if you can read minds. Having a talent doesn't—"

"Don't lecture *me*," Reynolds said. "No *numbskull* is going to tell me what to do."

"You're going too far," Curt told Reynolds. "Somebody's going to smack you down some day. If Fairchild doesn't do it, maybe I will."

"You and your meddling Corps," a Psi-class Resurrector said to Reynolds, grabbing hold of his collar. "You think you're above us because you can merge your minds. You think—"

"Take your hands off me," Reynolds said in an ugly voice. A glass crashed to the floor; one of the women became hysterical. Two men struggled; a third joined and, in a flash, a wild turmoil of resentment was boiling in the center of the room.

Fairchild shouted for order. "For God's sake, if we fight each other, we're finished. Don't you understand—*we have to work together!*"

It took a while before the uproar subsided. Reynolds pushed past Curt, white-faced and muttering under his breath. "I'm getting out of here." The other Telepaths trailed belligerently after him.

AS he and Julie drove slowly home through the bluish darkness, one section of Fairchild's propaganda repeated itself in Curt's brain over and over again.

"You've been told a victory by the Colonists means a victory of Psis over Normal human beings. This is not true! The Separation was not planned and is not conducted by either Psis or Mutants. The revolt was a spontaneous reaction by Colonists of all classes."

"I wonder," Curt mused. "Maybe Fairchild's wrong. Maybe he's being operated by Psis without knowing it. Personally, I like him, stupid as he is."

"Yes, he's stupid," Julie agreed. In the darkness of the car's cabin, her cigarette was a bright burning coal of wrath. In the back seat, Tim lay curled up asleep, warmed by the heat from the motor. The barren, rocky landscape of Proxima III rolled out ahead of the small surface-car, a dim expanse, hostile and alien. A few Man-made roads and



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buildings lay here and there among crop-tanks and fields.

"I don't trust Reynolds," Curt continued, knowing he was opening the previewed scene between them, yet not willing to sidestep it. "Reynolds is smart, unscrupulous and ambitious. What he wants is prestige and status. But Fairchild is thinking of the welfare of the Colony. He means all that stuff he dictated into his stones."

"That drivel," Julie was scornful. "The Terrans will laugh their heads off. Listening to it with a straight face was more than I could manage, and God knows our lives depend on this business."

"Well," Curt said carefully, knowing what he was getting into, "there may be Terrans with more sense of justice than you and Reynolds." He turned toward her. "I can see what you're going to do and so can you. Maybe you're right, maybe we ought to get it over with. Ten years is a long time when there's no feeling. And it wasn't our idea in the first place."

"No," Julie agreed. She crushed her cigarette out and shakily lit another. "If there had been another male Precog besides you, just *one*. That's something I can't forgive Reynolds for. It was his idea, you know. I never should have agreed. For the glory of the race! Onward and upward with the Psi banner! The mystical mating of the first real Precogs in history . . . and look what came of it!"

"Shut up," Curt said. "He's not asleep and he can hear you."

JULIE'S voice was bitter. "Hear me, yes. Understand, no. We wanted to know what the second generation would be like —well, now we know. Precog plus Precog equal *freak*. Useless mutant. Monster—let's face it, the M on his card stands for *monster*."

Curt's hands tightened on the wheel. "That's a word neither you nor anybody else is going to use."

"Monster!" She leaned close to him, teeth white in the light from the dashboard, eyes glowing. "Maybe the Terrans are right —maybe we Precogs ought to be sterilized and put to death. Erased. I think . . ." She broke off abruptly, unwilling to finish.

"Go ahead," Curt said. "You think perhaps when the revolt is successful and we're in control of the Colonies, we should go down the line selectively. With the Corps on top naturally."

"Separate the wheat from the chaff," Julie said. "First the Colonies from Terra. Then us from them. And when he comes up, even if he is my son . . ."

"What you're doing," Curt



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interrupted, "is passing judgment on people according to their use. Tim isn't useful, so there's no point in letting him live, right?" His blood pressure was on the way up, but he was past caring. "Breeding people like cattle. A human hasn't a right to live; that's a privilege we dole out according to our whim."

Curt raced the car down the deserted highway. "You heard Fairchild prattle about freedom and equality. He believes it and so do I. And I believe Tim—or anybody else—has a right to exist whether we can make use of his talent or whether he even *has* a talent."

"He has a right to live," Julie said, "but remember *he's not one of us*. He's an oddity. He doesn't have our ability, our—" she ground out the words triumphantly—"superior ability."

Curt pulled the car over to the edge of the highway. He brought it to a halt and pushed open the door. Dismal, arid air billowed into the car.

"You drive on home." He leaned over the back seat and prodded Tim into wakefulness. "Come on, kid. We're getting out."

Julie reached over to get the wheel. "When will you be home? Or have you got it completely set up now? Better make sure. She might be the kind that has a few others on the string."

Curt stepped from the car and the door slammed behind him. He took his son's hand and led him down the roadway to the black square of a ramp that rose darkly in the night gloom. As they started up the steps, he heard the car roar off down the highway, through the darkness toward home.

"Where are we?" Tim asked.

"You know this place. I bring you here every week. This is the school where they train people like you and me—where we Psis get our education."

## II

LIGHTS came on around them. Corridors branched off the main entrance ramp like metal vines.

"You may stay here for a few days," Curt said to his son. "Can you stand not seeing your mother for a while?"

Tim didn't answer. He had lapsed back into his usual silence as he followed along beside his father. Curt again wondered how the boy could be so withdrawn—as he obviously was—and yet be so terribly alert. The answer was written over each inch of the taut, young body. Tim was only withdrawn from contact with human beings. He maintained an almost compulsive tangency with the outside world—or, rather, *an* out-



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side world. Whatever it was, it didn't include humans, although it was made up of real, external objects.

As he had already previewed, his son suddenly broke away from him. Curt let the boy hurry down a side corridor. He watched as Tim stood tugging anxiously at a supply locker, trying to get it open.

"Okay," Curt said resignedly. He followed after him and unlocked the locker with his pass key. "See? There's nothing in it."

How completely the boy lacked precog could be seen by the flood of relief that swept his face. Curt's heart sank at the sight. The precious talent that both he and Julie possessed simply hadn't been passed on. Whatever the boy was, he was not a Precog.

It was past two in the morning, but the interior departments of the School Building were alight with activity. Curt moodily greeted a couple of Corpsmen lounging around the bar, surrounded by beers and ashtrays.

"Where's Sally?" he demanded. "I want to go in and see Big Noodle."

One of the Telepaths lazily jerked a thumb. "She's around somewhere. Over that way, in the kids' quarters, probably asleep. It's late." He eyed Curt, whose thoughts were on Julie. "You ought to get rid of a wife like that. She's too old and thin, anyhow. What you'd really like is a plump young dish—"

Curt lashed a blast of mental dislike and was satisfied to see the grinning young face go hard with antagonism. The other Telepath pulled himself upright and shouted after Curt, "When you're through with your wife, send her around to us."

"I'd say you're after a girl of about twenty," another Telepath said as he admitted Curt to the sleeping quarters of the children's wing. "Dark hair—correct me if I'm wrong—and dark eyes. You have a fully formed image. Maybe there's a specific girl. Let's see, she's short, fairly pretty and her name is—"

Curt cursed at the situation that required them to turn their minds over to the Corps. Telepaths were interlaced throughout the Colonies and, in particular, throughout the School and the offices of the Colonial Government. He tightened his grip around Tim's hand and led him through the doorway.

"This kid of yours," the Telepath said as Tim passed close to him, "sure probes queer. Mind if I go down a little?"

"Keep out of his mind!" Curt ordered sharply. He slammed the door shut after Tim, knowing it made no difference, but enjoying the feel of the heavy metal slid-



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ing in place. He pushed Tim down a narrow corridor and into a small room. Tim pulled away, intent on a side door; Curt savagely yanked him back. "There's nothing in there!" he reprimanded harshly. "That's only a bathroom."

Tim continued to tug away. He was still tugging when Sally appeared, fastening a robe around her, face puffy with sleep. "Hello, Mr. Purcell," she greeted Curt. "Hello, Tim." Yawning, she turned on a floor lamp and tossed herself down on a chair. "What can I do for you this time of night?"

SHE was thirteen, tall and gangling, with yellow cornsilk hair and freckled skin. She picked sleepily at her thumbnail and yawned again as the boy sat down across from her. To amuse him, she animated a pair of gloves lying on a sidetable. Tim laughed with delight as the gloves groped their way to the edge of the table, waved their fingers blindly and began a cautious descent to the floor.

"Fine," Curt said. "You're getting good. I'd say you're not cutting any classes."

Sally shrugged. "Mr. Purcell, the School can't teach me anything. You know I'm the most advanced Psi with the power of animation. They just let me work alone. In fact, I'm instructing a bunch of little kids, still Mutes, who might have something. I think a couple of them could work out, with practice. All they can give me is encouragement; you know, psychological stuff and lots of vitamins and fresh air. But they can't *teach* me anything."

"They can teach you how important you are," Curt said. He had previewed this, of course. During the last half hour, he had selected a number of possible approaches, discarded one after another, finally ended with this. "I came over to see Big Noodle. That meant I had to wake you. Do you know why?"

"Sure," Sally answered. "You're afraid of him. And since Big Noodle is afraid of *me*, you need me to come along." She allowed the gloves to sag back into immobility as she got to her feet. "Well, let's go."

He had seen Big Noodle many times in his life, but he had never got used to the sight. Awed, in spite of his preview of this scene, Curt stood in the open space before the platform, gazing up, silent and impressed as always.

"He's fat," Sally said practically. "If he doesn't get thinner, he won't live long."

Big Noodle slumped like a gray, sickly pudding in the immense chair the Tech Depart-



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ment had built for him. His eyes were half-closed; his pulpy arms lay slack and inert at his sides. Wads of oozing dough hung in folds over the arms and sides of the chair. Big Noodle's egglike skull was fringed with damp, stringy hair, matted like decayed seaweed. His nails were lost in the sausage fingers. His teeth were rotting and black. His tiny plate-blue eyes flickered dully as he identified Curt and Sally, but the obese body did not stir.

"He's resting," Sally explained. "He just ate."

"Hello," Curt said.

From the swollen mouth, between rolls of pink flesh lips, a grumbled response came.

"He doesn't like to be bothered this late," Sally said yawning. "I don't blame him."

SHE wandered around the room, amusing herself by animating light brackets along the wall. The brackets struggled to pull free from the hot-pour plastic in which they were set.

"This seems so dumb, if you don't mind my saying so, Mr. Purcell. The Telepaths keep Terran infiltrators from coming in here, and all this business of yours is against them. That means you're helping Terra, doesn't it? If we didn't have the Corps to watch out for us—"

"I keep out Terrans," Big Noodle mumbled. "I have my wall and I turn back everything."

"You turn back projectiles," Sally said, "but you can't keep out infiltrators. A Terran infiltrator could come in here this minute and you wouldn't know. You're just a big stupid lump of lard."

Her description was accurate. But the vast mound of fat was the nexus of the Colony's defense, the most talented of the Psis. Big Noodle was the core of the Separation movement . . . and the living symbol of its problem.

Big Noodle had almost infinite parakinetic power and the mind of a moronic three-year-old. He was, specifically, an idiot savant. His legendary powers had absorbed his whole personality, withered and degenerated it, rather than expanded it. He could have swept the Colony aside years ago if his bodily lusts and fears had been accompanied by cunning. But Big Noodle was helpless and inert, totally dependent on the instructions of the Colonial Government, reduced to sullen passivity by his terror of Sally.

"I ate a whole pig." Big Noodle struggled to a quasi-sitting position, belched, wiped feebly at his chin. "Two pigs, in fact. Right here in this room, just a little while ago. I could get more if I wanted."



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The diet of the colonists consisted mainly of tank-grown artificial protein. Big Noodle was amusing himself at their expense.

"The pig," Big Noodle continued grandly, "came from Terra. The night before, I had a flock of wild ducks. And before that, I brought over some kind of animal from Betelgeuse IV. It doesn't have any name; it just runs around and eats."

"Like you," Sally said. "Only *you* don't run around."

Big Noodle giggled. Pride momentarily overcame his fear of the girl. "Have some candy," he offered. A shower of chocolate rattled down like hail. Curt and Sally retreated as the floor of the chamber disappeared under the deluge. With the chocolate came fragments of machinery, cardboard boxes, sections of display counter, a jagged chunk of concrete floor. "Candy factory on Terra," Big Noodle explained happily. "I've got it pinpointed pretty good."

Tim had awakened from his contemplation. He bent down and eagerly picked up a handful of chocolates.

"Go ahead," Curt said to him. "You might as well take them."

"I'm the only one that gets the candy," Big Noodle thundered, outraged. The chocolate vanished. "I sent it back," he explained peevishly. "It's mine."

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THERE was nothing malevolent in Big Noodle, only an infinite childish selfishness. Through his power, every object in the Universe had become his possession. There was nothing outside the reach of his bloated arms; he could reach for the Moon and get it. Fortunately, most things were outside his span of comprehension. He was uninterested.

"Let's cut out these games," Curt said. "Can you say if any Telepaths are within probe range of us?"

Big Noodle made a begrudging search. He had a consciousness of objects wherever they were. Through his talent, he was in contact with the physical contents of the Universe.

"None near here," he declared after a time. "One about a hundred feet off . . . I'll move him back. I hate Teeps getting into my privacy."

"Everybody hates Teeps," Sally said. "It's a nasty, dirty talent. Looking into other people's minds is like watching them when they're bathing or dressing or eating. It isn't natural."

Curt grinned. "Is it any different from Precog? You wouldn't call that natural."

"Precog has to do with events, not people," Sally said. "Knowing what's going to happen isn't any worse than knowing what's already happened."

"It might even be better," Curt pointed out.

"No," Sally said emphatically. "It's got us into this trouble. I have to watch what I think all the time because of you. Every time I see a Teep, I get goose bumps, and no matter how hard I try, I can't keep from thinking about *her*, just because I know I'm not supposed to."

"My precog faculty has nothing to do with Pat," Curt said. "Precog doesn't introduce fatality. Locating Pat was an intricate job. It was a deliberate choice I made."

"Aren't you sorry?" Sally demanded.

"No."

"If it wasn't for me," Big Noodle interrupted, "you never would have got across to Pat."

"I wish we hadn't," Sally said fervently. "If it wasn't for Pat, we wouldn't be mixed up in all this business." She shot a hostile glance at Curt. "And I don't think she's pretty."

"What would you suggest?" Curt asked the child with more patience than he felt. He had previewed the futility of making a child and an idiot understand about Pat. "You know we can't pretend we never found her."

"I know," Sally admitted. "And the Teeps have got something from our minds already.



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That's why there're so many of them hanging around here. It's a good thing we don't know where she is."

"I know where she is," Big Noodle said. "I know exactly where."

"No, you don't," Sally answered. "You just know how to get to her and that's not the same thing. You can't explain it; you just send us over there and back."

"IT'S a planet," Big Noodle said angrily, "with funny plants and a lot of green things. And the air's thin. She lives in a camp. People go out and farm all day. There's only a few people there. A lot of dopy animals live there. It's cold."

"Where is it?" Curt asked.

Big Noodle sputtered. "It's . . ." His pulpy arms waved. "It's some place near . . ." He gave up, wheezed resentfully at Sally and then brought a tank of filthy water into being above the girl's head. As the water flowed toward her, the child made a few brief motions with her hands.

Big Noodle shrieked in terror and the water vanished. He lay panting with fright, body quivering, as Sally mopped at a wet spot on her robe. She had animated the fingers of his left hand.

"Better not do that again," Curt said to her. "His heart might give out."

"The big slob." Sally rummaged around in a supply closet. "Well, if you've made up your mind, we might as well get it over with. Only let's not stay so long. You get to talking with Pat and then the two of you go off, and you don't come back for hours. At night, it's freezing and they don't have any heating plants." She pulled down a coat from the closet. "I'll take this with me."

"We're not going," Curt told her. "This time is going to be different."

Sally blinked. "Different? How?"

Even Big Noodle was surprised. "I was just getting ready to move you across," he complained.

"I know," Curt said firmly. "But this time I want you to bring Pat here. Bring her to this room, understand? This is the time we've been talking about. The big moment's arrived."

THERE was only one person with Curt as he entered Fairchild's office. Sally was now in bed, back at the school. Big Noodle never stirred from his chamber. Tim was still at the School, in the hands of Psi-class authorities, not Telepaths.

Pat followed hesitantly, frightened and nervous as the men sitting around the office glanced up in annoyance.



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She was perhaps nineteen, slim and copper-skinned, with large dark eyes. She wore a canvas workshirt and jeans, heavy shoes caked with mud. Her tangle of black curls was tied back and knotted with a red bandanna. Her rolled-up sleeves showed tanned, competent arms. At her leather belt she carried a knife, a field telephone and an emergency pack of rations and water.

"This is the girl," Curt said. "Take a good look at her."

"Where are you from?" Fairchild asked Pat. He pushed aside a heap of directives and memotapes to find his pipe.

Pat hesitated. "I—" she began. She turned uncertainly to Curt. "You told me never to say, even to you."

"It's okay," Curt said gently. "You can tell us now." He explained to Fairchild, "I can preview what she's going to say, but I never knew before. I didn't want to get it probed out of me by the Corps."

"I was born on Proxima VI," Pat said in a low voice. "I grew up there. This is the first time I've left the planet."

Fairchild's eyes widened. "That's a wild place. In fact, about our most primitive region."

Around the office, his group of Norm and Psi consultants moved closer to watch. One wide-shouldered old man, face weathered as stone, eyes shrewd and alert, raised his hand. "Are we to understand that Big Noodle brought you here?"

Pat nodded. "I didn't know. I mean it was unexpected." She tapped her belt. "I was working, clearing the brush . . . we've been trying to expand, develop more usable land."

"What's your name?" Fairchild asked her.

"Patricia Ann Connley."

"What class?"

The girl's sun-cracked lips moved. "Mute-class."

A stir moved through the officials. "You're a Mutant," the old man asked her, "without Psi powers? Exactly how do you differ from the Norm?"

PAT glanced at Curt and he moved forward to answer for her. "This girl will be twenty-one in two years. You know what that means. If she's still in the Mute-class, she'll be sterilized and put in a camp. That's our Colonial policy. And if Terra whips us, she'll be sterilized in any case, as will all of us Psis and Mutants."

"Are you trying to say she has a talent?" Fairchild asked. "You want us to lift her from Mute to Psi?" His hands fumbled at the papers on the table. "We get a thousand petitions a day like this. You came down here at four in the morning just for this? There's



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a routine form you can fill out, a common office procedure."

The old man cleared his throat and blurted, "This girl is close to you?"

"That's right," Curt said. "I have a personal interest."

"How did you meet her?" the old man asked. "If she's never been off Proxima VI . . ."

"Big Noodle shuttled me there and back," Curt answered. "I've made the trip about twenty times. I didn't know it was Prox VI, of course. I only knew it was a Colony planet, primitive, still wild. Originally, I came across an analysis of her personality and neural characteristics in our Mute-class files. As soon as I understood, I gave Big Noodle the identifying brain pattern and had him send me across."

"What is that pattern?" Fairchild asked. "What's different about her?"

"Pat's talent has never been acknowledged as Psi," Curt said. "In a way, it isn't, but it's going to be one of the most useful talents we've discovered. We should have known it would arise. Wherever some organism develops, so does another to prey on it."

"Get to the point," Fairchild said. He rubbed the blue stubble of his chin. "When you called me, all you said was that—"

"Consider the various Psi talents as survival weapons," Curt said. "Consider telepathic ability as evolving for the defense of an organism. It puts the Telepath head and shoulders above his enemies. Is this going to continue? *Don't these things usually balance out?*"

It was the old man who understood. "I see," he said with a grin of wry admiration. "This girl is opaque to telepathic probes."

"That's right," Curt said. "The first, but there'll most likely be others. And not only defenses to telepathic probes. There are going to be organisms resistant to Parakineticists, to Precogs like myself, to Resurrectors, to Animators, to every and all Psi powers. Now we have a fourth class. The Anti-Psi class. It was bound to come into existence."

## III

THE coffee was artificial, but hot and satisfying. Like the eggs and bacon it was synthetically compounded from tank-grown meals and proteins, with a carefully regulated mix of native-grown plant fiber. As they ate, the morning sun rose outside. The barren gray landscape of Proxima III was touched with a faint tint of red.

"It looks nice," Pat said shyly, glancing out the kitchen window.



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"Maybe I can examine your farming equipment. You have a lot we don't have."

"We've had more time," Curt reminded her. "This planet was settled a century before your own. You'll catch up with us. In many ways Prox VI is richer and more fertile."

Julie wasn't sitting at the table. She stood leaning against the refrigerator, arms folded, her face hard and frigid. "Is she really staying here?" she demanded in a thin, clipped voice. "In this house with us?"

"That's right," Curt answered.

"How long?"

"A few days. A week. Until I can get Fairchild moving."

Faint sounds stirred beyond the house. Here and there in the residential syndrome people were waking up and preparing for the day. The kitchen was warm and cheerful; a window of clear plastic separated it from the landscape of tumbled rocks, thin trees and plants that stretched to a line of weathered mountains a few hundred miles off. Cold morning wind whipped around the rubbish that littered the deserted inter-system field at the rim of the syndrome.

"That field was the link between us and the Sol System," Curt said. "The umbilical cord. Gone now, for a while at least."

"It's beautiful," Pat stated.

"The field?"

She gestured at the towers of an elaborate mining and smelting combine partly visible beyond the rows of houses. "Those, I mean. The landscape is like ours; bleak and awful. It's all the installations that mean something . . . where you've pushed the landscape back." She shivered. "We've been fighting trees and rocks all my life, trying to get the soil usable, trying to make a place to live. We don't have any heavy equipment on Prox VI, just hand tools and our own backs. You know, you've seen our villages."

Curt sipped his coffee. "Are there many Psis on Prox VI?"

"A few. Mostly minor. A few Resurrectors, a handful of Animators. No one even as good as Sally." She laughed, showing her even white teeth. "We're rustic hicks, compared to this urban metropolis. You saw how we live. Villages stuck here and there, farms, a few isolated supply centers, one miserable field. You saw my family, my brothers and my father, our home life, if you can call that log shack a home. Three centuries behind Terra."

"They taught you about Terra?"

"Oh, yes. Tapes came direct from the Sol System until the Separation. Not that I'm sorry we separated. We should have



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been out working anyhow, instead of watching the tapes. But it was interesting to see the mother world, the big cities, all the billions of people. And the earlier colonies on Venus and Mars. It was amazing." Her voice throbbed with excitement. "Those colonies were like ours, once. They had to clear Mars the same way we're clearing Prox VI. We'll get Prox VI cleared, cities built up and fields laid out. And we'll all go on doing our part."

JULIE detached herself from the refrigerator and began gathering dishes from the table without looking at Pat. "Maybe I'm being naive," she said to Curt, "but where's she going to sleep?"

"You know the answer," Curt answered patiently. "You've previewed all this. Tim's at the School so she can have his room."

"What am I supposed to do? Feed her, wait on her, be her maid? What am I supposed to tell people when they see her?" Julie's voice rose to a shrill. "Am I supposed to say she's my *sister?*"

Pat smiled across at Curt, toying with a button on her shirt. It was apparent that she was untouched, remote from Julie's harsh voice. Probably that was why the Corps couldn't probe her. Detached, almost aloof, she seemed unaffected by rancor and violence.

"She won't need any supervision," Curt said to his wife. "Leave her alone."

Julie lit a cigarette with rapid, jerky fingers. "I'll be glad to leave her alone. But she can't go around in those work clothes looking like a convict."

"Find her something of yours," Curt suggested.

Julie's face twisted. "She couldn't wear my things; she's too heavy." To Pat she said with deliberate cruelty, "What are you, about a size 30 waist? My God, what have you been doing, dragging a plow? Look at her neck and shoulders . . . she looks like a field-horse."

Curt got abruptly to his feet and pushed his chair back from the table. "Come on," he said to Pat. It was vital to show her something besides this undercurrent of resentment. "I'll show you around."

Pat leaped up, her cheeks flushed. "I want to see everything. This is all so new." She hurried after him as he grabbed his coat and headed for the front door. "Can we see the School where you train the Psis? I want to see how you develop their abilities. And can we see how the Colonial Government is organized? I want to see how Fairchild



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works with the Psis."

Julie followed the two of them out onto the front porch. Cool, chill morning air billowed around them, mixed with the sounds of cars heading from the residential syndrome toward the city. "In my room you'll find skirts and blouses," she said to Pat. "Pick out something light. It's warmer here than on Prox VI."

"Thank you," Pat said. She hurried back into the house.

"SHE'S pretty," Julie said to Curt. "When I get her washed and dressed, I guess she'll look all right. She's got a figure—in a healthy sort of way. But is there anything to her mind? To her personality?"

"Sure," Curt answered.

Julie shrugged. "Well, she's young. A lot younger than I am." She smiled wanly. "Remember when we first met? Ten years ago . . . I was so curious to see you, talk to you. The only other Precog besides myself. I had so many dreams and hopes about both of us. I was her age, perhaps a little younger."

"It was hard to see how it would work out," Curt said. "Even for us. A half-hour preview isn't much, in a thing like this."

"How long has it been?" Julie asked.

"Not long."

"Have there been other girls?"

"No. Only Pat."

"When I realized there was somebody else, I hoped she was good enough for you. If I could be sure this girl had something to offer. I suppose it's her remoteness that gives an impression of emptiness. And you have more rapport with her than I do. Probably you don't feel the lack, if it is a lack. And it may be tied in with her talent, her opaqueness."

Curt fastened the cuffs of his coat. "I think it's a kind of innocence. She's not touched by a lot of things we have here in our urban, industrial society. When you were talking about her it didn't seem to reach her."

Julie touched his arm lightly. "Then take care of her. She's going to need it around here. I wonder what Reynolds' reaction is going to be."

"Do you see anything?"

"Nothing about her. You're going off . . . I'm by myself for the next interval, as far as I can preview, working around the house. As for now, I'm going into town to do some shopping, to pick up some new clothes. Maybe I can get something for her to wear."

"We'll get her things," Curt said. "She should get her clothes first-hand."

Pat appeared in a cream-col-



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ored blouse and ankle-length yellow skirt, black eyes sparkling, hair moist with morning mist. "I'm ready! Can we go now?"

Sunlight glittered down on them as they stepped eagerly onto the level ground. "We'll go over to the School first and pick up my son."

THE three of them walked slowly along the gravel path that led by the white concrete School Building, by the faint sheen of wet lawn that was carefully maintained against the hostile weather of the planet. Tim scampered on ahead of Pat and Curt, listening and peering intently past the objects around him, body tensed forward, lithe and alert.

"He doesn't speak much," Pat observed.

"He's too busy to pay any attention to us."

Tim halted to gaze behind a shrub. Pat followed a little after him, curious. "What's he looking for? He's a beautiful child . . . he has Julie's hair. She has nice hair."

"Look over there," Curt said to his son. "There're plenty of children to sort over. Go play with them."

At the entrance to the main School Building, parents and their children swarmed in restless, anxious groups. Uniformed School Officials moved among them, sorting, checking, dividing the children into various subgroups. Now and then a small sub-group was admitted through the check-system into the School Building. Apprehensive, pathetically hopeful, the mothers waited outside.

Pat said. "It's like that on Prox VI, when the School Teams come to make their census and inspection. Everybody wants to get the unclassified children put up into the Psi-class. My father tried for years to get me out of Mute. He finally gave up. That report you saw was one of his periodic requests. It was filed away somewhere, wasn't it? Gathering dust in a drawer."

"If this works out," Curt said, "many more children will have a chance to get out of the Mute-class. You won't be the only one. You're the first of many, we hope."

Pat kicked at a pebble. "I don't feel so new, so astonishingly different. I don't feel anything at all. You say I'm opaque to telepathic invasion, but I've only been scanned one or two times in my life." She touched her head with her copper-colored fingers and smiled. "If no Corpsman is scanning me, I'm just like anybody else."

"Your ability is a counter-talent," Curt pointed out. "It takes



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the original talent to call it into being. Naturally, you're not conscious of it during your ordinary routine of living."

"A counter-talent. It seems so—so negative. I don't *do* anything, like you do . . . I don't move objects or turn stones into bread or give birth without impregnation or bring dead people back to life. I just negate somebody else's ability. It seems like a hostile, stultifying sort of ability—to just cancel out the telepathic factor."

"That could be as useful as the telepathic factor itself. Especially for all of us non-teeps."

"SUPPOSE *somebody comes* along who balances your ability, Curt." She had turned dead serious, sounding discouraged and unhappy. "People will arise who balance out *all* Psi talents. We'll be back where we started from. It'll be like not having Psi at all."

"I don't think so," Curt answered. "The Anti-Psi factor is a natural restoration of balance. One insect learns to fly, so another learns to build a web to trap him. Is that the same as no flight? Clams developed hard shells to protect them; therefore birds learn to fly the clam up high in the air and drop him on a rock. In a sense you're a life-form preying on the Psis and the Psis are life-forms that prey on the Norms. That makes you a friend of the Norm-class. Balance, the full circle, predator and prey. It's an eternal system and frankly I can't see how it could be improved."

"You might be considered a traitor."

"Yes," Curt agreed. "I suppose so."

"Doesn't it bother you?"

"It bothers me that people will feel hostile toward me. But you can't live very long without arousing hostility. Julie feels hostility toward you. Reynolds feels hostility for me already. You can't please everybody, because people want different things. Please one and you displease another. In this life you have to decide which of them you want to please. I'd prefer to please Fairchild."

"He should be glad."

"If he's aware of what's going on. Fairchild's an overworked bureaucrat. He may decide I exceeded my authority in acting on your father's petition. He may want it filed back where it was, and you returned to Prox VI. He may even fine me a penalty."

THEY left the School and drove down the long highway to the shore of the ocean. Tim shouted with happiness at the vast stretch of deserted beach



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as he raced off, arms waving, his yells lost in the ceaseless lapping of the ocean waves. The red-tinted sky warmed above them. The three of them were completely isolated by the bowl of ocean and sky and beach. No other humans were visible, only a flock of indigenous birds strolling around in search of sand crustaceans.

"It's wonderful," Pat said, awed. "I guess the oceans on Terra are like this, big and bright and red."

"Blue," Curt corrected. He lay sprawled out on the warm sand, smoking his pipe and gazing moodily at the probing waves that oozed up on the beach a few yards away. The waves left heaps of steaming sea-plants stranded.

Tim came hurrying back with his arms full of the dripping, slimy weeds. He dumped the coils of still quivering vegetable life in front of Pat and his father.

"He likes the ocean," Pat said.

"No hiding places for Others," Curt answered. "He can see for miles, so he knows they can't creep up on him."

"Others?" She was curious. "He's such a strange boy. So worried and busy. He takes his alternate world so seriously. Not a pleasant world, I guess. Too many responsibilities."

The sky turned hot. Tim began building an intricate structure out of wet sand lugged from the water's edge.

Pat scampered barefooted to join Tim. The two of them labored, adding infinite walls and side-buildings and towers. In the hot glare of the water, the girl's bare shoulders and back dripped perspiration. She sat up finally, gasping and exhausted, pushed her hair from her eyes and struggled to her feet.

"It's too hot," she gasped, throwing herself down beside Curt. "The weather's so different here. I'm sleepy."

Tim continued building the structure. The two of them watched him languidly, crumbling bits of dry sand between their fingers.

"I guess," Pat said after a while, "there isn't much left to your marriage. I've made it impossible for you and Julie to live together."

"It's not your fault. We were never really together. All we had in common was our talent and that has nothing to do with the over-all personality. The total individual."

Pat slid off her skirt and waded down to the ocean's edge. She curled up in the swirling pink foam and began washing her hair. Half-buried in the piles of foam and seakelp, her sleek, tanned body glowed wet and healthy in the overhead sun.



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"Come on!" she called to Curt. "It's so cool."

Curt knocked the ashes from his pipe into the dry sand. "We have to get back. Sooner or later I've got to have it out with Fairchild. We need a decision."

Pat strode from the water, body streaming, head tossed back, hair dripping down her shoulders. Tim attracted her attention and she halted to study his sand building.

"You're right," she said to Curt. "We shouldn't be here wading and dozing and building sand castles. Fairchild's trying to keep the Separation working, and we have real things to build up in the backward Colonies."

AS she dried herself with Curt's coat she told him about Proxima VI.

"It's like the Middle Ages back on Terra. Most of our people think Psi powers are miracles. They think the Psis are saints."

"I suppose that's what the saints were," Curt agreed. "They raised the dead, turned inorganic material into organic and moved objects around. The Psi ability has probably always been present in the human race. The Psi-class individual isn't new; he's always been with us, helping here and there, sometimes doing harm when he exploited his talent against mankind."

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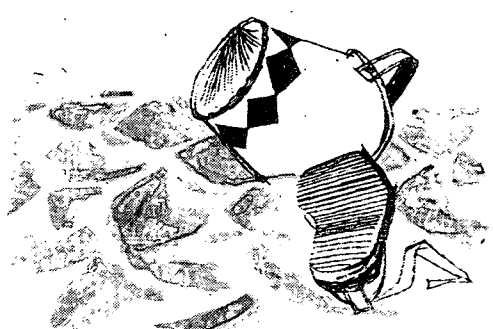

Pat tugged on her sandals. "There's an old woman near our village, a first-rate Resurrector. She won't leave Prox VI; she won't go with the Government Teams or get mixed up with the School. She wants to stay where she is, being a witch and wise woman. People come to her and she heals the sick."

Pat fastened her blouse and started toward the car. "When I was seven I broke my arm. She put her old withered hands on it and the break repaired itself. Apparently her hands radiate some kind of generative field that affects the growth-rate of the cells. And I remember one time when a boy was drowned and she brought him back to life."

"Get an old woman who can heal, another who can precog the future, and your village is set up. We Psis have been helping longer than we realize."

"Come on, Tim!" Pat called, tanned hands to her lips. "Time to go back!"

The boy bent down one last time to peer into the depths of his structure, the elaborate inner sections of his sand building.

Suddenly he screamed, leaped back and came racing frantically toward the car.

Pat caught hold of him and he clung to her, face distorted with terror. "What is it?" Pat was frightened. "Curt, *what was it?*"



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Curt came over and squatted down beside the boy. "What was in there?" he asked gently. "You built it."

The boy's lips moved. "A *Left,*" he muttered almost inaudibly. "There was a Left, I know it. The first real Left. And it hung on."

Pat and Curt glanced at each other uneasily. "What's he talking about?" Pat asked.

Curt got behind the wheel of the car and pushed open the doors for the two of them. "I don't know. But I think we'd better get back to town. I'll talk to Fairchild and get this business of Anti-Psi cleared up. Once that's out of the way, you and I can devote ourselves to Tim for the rest of our lives."

FAIRCHILD was pale and tired as he sat behind his desk in his office, hands folded in front of him, a few Norm-class advisors here and there, listening intently. Dark circles mooned under his eyes. As he listened to Curt he sipped at a glass of tomato juice.

"In other words," Fairchild muttered, "you're saying we can't really trust you Psis. It's a paradox." His voice broke with despair. "A Psi comes here and says *all Psis lie.* What the hell am I supposed to do?"

"Not all Psis." Being able to preview the scene gave Curt remarkable calmness. "I'm saying that in a way Terra is right . . . the existence of super-talented humans poses a problem for those without super-talents. But Terra's answer is wrong; sterilization is vicious and senseless. But cooperation isn't as easy as you imagine. You're dependent on our talents for survival and that means we have you where we want you. We can dictate to you because, without us, Terra would come in and clap you all into military prison."

"And destroy you Psis," the old man standing behind Fairchild reminded him. "Don't forget that."

Curt eyed the old man. It was the same wide-shouldered, gray-faced individual of the night before. There was something familiar about him. Curt peered closer and gasped, in spite of his preview.

"You're a Psi," he said.

The old man bowed slightly. "Evidently."

"Come on," Fairchild said. "All right, we've seen this girl and we'll accept your theory of Anti-Psi. *What do you want us to do?*" He wiped his forehead miserably. "I know Reynolds is a menace. But damn it, Terran infiltrators would be running all around here without the Corps!"

"I want you to create a legal fourth class," Curt stated. "The



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Anti-Psi class. I want you to give it status-immunity from sterilization. I want you to publicize it. Women come in here with their children from all parts of the Colonies, trying to convince you they've got Psis to offer, not Mutes. I want you to set up the Anti-Psi class as a similar goal, to get them started selecting the Anti-Psi talents out where we can utilize them."

Fairchild licked his dry lips. "You think more exist already?"

"Very possibly. I came on Pat by accident. But get the flow started! Get the mothers hovering anxiously over their cribs for Anti-Psis . . . We'll need all we can get."

There was silence.

"CONSIDER what Mr. Purcell is doing," the old man said at last. "An Anti-Precog may arise, a person whose actions in the future can't be previewed. A sort of Heisenberg's indeterminate particle . . . a man who throws off all precog prediction. And yet Mr. Purcell has come here to make his suggestions. He's thinking of Separation, not himself."

Fairchild's fingers twitched. "Reynolds is going to be mad as hell."

"He's already mad," Curt said. "He undoubtedly knows about this right now."

"He'll protest!"

Curt laughed, some of the officials smiled. "Of course he'll protest. Don't you understand? *You're being eliminated.* You think Norms are going to be around much longer? Charity is damn scarce in this universe. You Norms gape at Psis like rustics at a carnival. Wonderful . . . magical. You encouraged Psis, built the School, gave us our chance here in the Colonies. In fifty years you'll be slave laborers for us. You'll be doing our manual labor — unless you have sense enough to create the fourth class, the Anti-Psi class. You've got to stand up to Reynolds."

"I hate to alienate him," Fairchild muttered. "Why the hell can't we all work together?" He appealed to the others around the room. "Why can't we all be brothers?"

"Because," Curt answered, "we're not. Face facts. Brotherhood is a fine idea, but it'll come into existence sooner if we achieve a balance of social forces."

"Is it possible," the old man suggested, "that once the concept of Anti-Psi reaches Terra the sterilization program will be modified? This idea may erase the irrational terror the non-mutants have, their phobia that we're monsters about to invade and take over their world. Sit next



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to them in theaters. Marry their sisters."

"All right," Fairchild agreed. "I'll construct an official directive. Give me an hour to word it —I want to get all the loopholes out."

Curt got to his feet. It was over. As he had previewed, Fairchild had agreed. "We should start getting reports almost at once," he said. "As soon as routine checking of the files begins."

Fairchild nodded. "Yes, almost at once."

"I assume you'll keep me informed." Apprehension moved through Curt. He had succeeded . . . *or had he?* He scanned the next half hour. There was nothing negative he could preview. He caught a quick scene of himself and Pat, himself and Julie and Tim. But still his uneasiness remained, an intuition deeper than his precog.

Everything looked fine, but he knew better. Something basic and chilling had gone wrong.

## IV

HE met Pat in a small out-of-the-way bar at the rim of the city. Darkness flickered around their table. The air was thick and pungent with the presence of people. Bursts of muted laughter broke out, muffled by the steady blur of conversation.

"How'd it go?" she asked, eyes large and dark, as he seated himself across from her. "Did Fairchild agree?"

Curt ordered a Tom Collins for her and bourbon and water for himself. Then he outlined what had taken place.

"So everything's all right." Pat reached across the table to touch his hand. "Isn't it?"

Curt sipped at his drink. "I guess so. The Anti-Psi class is being formed. But it was too easy. Too simple."

"You can see ahead, can't you? Is anything going to happen?"

Across the dark room the music machine was creating vague patterns of sound, random harmonics and rhythms in a procession of soft clusters that drifted through the room. A few couples moved languidly together in response to the shifting patterns.

Curt offered her a cigarette and the two of them lit up from the candle in the center of the table. "Now you have your status."

Pat's dark eyes flickered. "Yes, that's so. The new Anti-Psi class. I don't have to worry now. That's all over."

"We're waiting for others. If no others show, you're a member of a unique class. The only Anti-Psi in the Universe."

For a moment Pat was silent. Then she asked. "What do you see after that?" She sipped her



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drink. "I mean, I'm going to stay here, aren't I? Or will I be going back?"

"You'll stay here."

"With you?"

"With me. And with Tim."

"What about Julie?"

"The two of us signed mutual releases a year ago. They're on file, somewhere. Never processed. It was an agreement we made, so neither of us could block the other later on."

"I think Tim likes me. He won't mind, will he?"

"Not at all," Curt said.

"It ought to be nice, don't you think? The three of us. We can work with Tim, try to find out about his talent, what he is and what he's thinking. I'd enjoy that . . . he responds to me. And we have a long time; there's no hurry."

HER fingers clasped around his. In the shifting darkness of the bar her features swam close to his own. Curt leaned forward, hesitated a moment as her warm breath stained his lips and then kissed her.

Pat smiled up at him. "They're so many things for us to do. Here, and perhaps later on Prox VI. I want to go back there, sometime. Could we? Just for a while; we wouldn't have to stay. So I can see that it's still going on, all the things I worked at all my life. So I could see my world."

"Sure," Curt said. "Yes, we'll go back there."

Across from them a nervous little man had finished his garlic bread and wine. He wiped his mouth, glanced at his wristwatch and got to his feet. As he squeezed past Curt he reached into his pocket, jangled change and jerkily brought out his hand. Gripping a slender tube, he turned around, bent over Pat, and depressed the tube.

A single pellet dribbled from the tube, clung for a split second to the shiny surface of her hair, and then was gone. A dull echo of vibration rolled up toward the nearby tables. The nervous little man continued on.

Curt was on his feet, numb with shock. He was still gazing down, paralyzed, when Reynolds appeared beside him and firmly pulled him away.

"She's dead," Reynolds was saying. "Try to understand. She died instantly; there was no pain. It goes directly to the central nervous system. She wasn't even aware of it."

Nobody in the bar had stirred. They sat at their tables, faces impassive, watching as Reynolds signaled for more light. The darkness faded and the objects of the room leaped into clarity.

"Stop that machine," Reynolds ordered sharply. The music



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machine stumbled into silence. "These people here are Corpsmen," he explained to Curt. "We probed your thoughts about this place as you entered Fairchild's office."

"But I didn't catch it," Curt muttered. "There was no warning. No preview."

"The man who killed her is an Anti-Psi," Reynolds said. "We've known of the category for a number of years; remember, it took an initial probe to uncover Patricia Connley's shield."

"Yes," Curt agreed. "She was probed years ago. By one of you."

"We don't like the Anti-Psi idea. We wanted to keep the class out of existence, but we were interested. We've uncovered and neutralized fourteen Anti-Psis over the past decade. On this, we have virtually the whole Psi-class behind us—except you. The problem, of course, is that no Anti-Psi talent can be brought out unless matched against the Psionic talent it negates."

Curt understood. "You had to match this man against a Precog. And there's only one Precog other than myself."

"Julie was cooperative. We brought the problem to her a few months ago. We had definite proof to give her concerning your affair with this girl. I don't understand how you expected to keep Telepaths from knowing your plans, but apparently you did. In any case, the girl is dead. And there won't be any Anti-Psi class. We waited as long as possible, for we don't like to destroy talented individuals. But Fairchild was on the verge of signing the enabling legislation, so we couldn't hold off any longer."

Curt hit out frantically, knowing even as he did so that it was futile. Reynolds slid back; his foot tangled with the table and he staggered. Curt leaped on him, smashed the tall, cold glass that had held Pat's drink and lifted the jagged edges over Reynolds' face.

Corpsmen pulled him off.

CURT broke away. He reached down and gathered up Pat's body. She was still warm; her face was calm, expressionless, an empty burned-out shell that mirrored nothing. He carried her from the bar and out onto the frigid night-dark street. A moment later he lowered her into his car and crept behind the wheel.

He drove to the School, parked the car, and carried her into the main building. Pushing past astonished officials, he reached the childrens' quarters and forced open the door to Sally's rooms with his shoulder.

She was wide-awake and fully



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dressed. Seated on a straight-backed chair the child faced him defiantly. "You see?" she shrilled. "See what you did?"

He was too dazed to answer.

"It's all your fault! You made Reynolds do it. He *had* to kill her." She leaped to her feet and ran toward him, screaming hysterically. "You're an enemy! You're against us! You want to make trouble for all of us. I told Reynolds what you were doing and he—"

Her voice trailed off as he moved out of the room with his heavy armload. As he lumbered up the corridor the hysterical girl followed after him.

"You want to go across—you want me to get Big Noodle to take you across!" She ran in front of him, darting here and there like a maniacal insect. Tears ran down her cheeks; her face was distorted beyond recognition. She followed him all the way to Big Noodle's chamber. "I'm not going to help you! You're against all of us and I'm never going to help you again! I'm *glad* she's dead! I wish you were dead, too. And you're going to be dead when Reynolds catches you. He told me so. He said there wasn't going to be any more like you and we would have things the way they ought to be, and nobody, not you nor any of those *numbskulls* can stop us!"

He lowered Pat's body onto the floor and moved out of the chamber. Sally raced after him.

"You know what he did to Fairchild? He has him fixed so he can't do anything ever again."

Curt tripped a locked door and entered his son's room. The door closed after him and the girl's frenzied screams died to a muffled vibration. Tim sat up in bed, surprised and half-stupefied by sleep.

"Come on," Curt said. He dragged the boy from his bed, dressed him, and hurried him outside into the hall.

Sally stopped them as they reentered Big Noodle's chamber. "He won't do it," she screamed. "He's afraid of me and I told him not to. You understand?"

BIG Noodle lay slumped in his massive chair. He lifted his great head as Curt approached him. "What do you want?" he muttered. "What's the matter with her?" He indicated Pat's inert body. "She pass out or something?"

"Reynolds killed her!" Sally shrilled, dancing around Curt and his son. "And he's going to kill Mr. Purcell! He's going to kill everybody that tries to stop us!"

Big Noodle's thick features darkened. The wattles of bristly flesh turned a flushed, mottled crimson. "What's going on,



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Curt?" he muttered.

"The Corps is taking over," Curt answered.

"They killed your girl?"

"Yes."

Big Noodle strained to a sitting position and leaned forward. "Reynolds is after you?"

"Yes."

Big Noodle licked his thick lips hesitantly. "Where do you want to go?" he asked hoarsely. "I can move you out of here, to Terra, maybe. Or—"

Sally made frantic motions with her hands. Part of Big Noodle's chair writhed and became animate. The arms twisted around him, cut viciously into his puddinglike paunch. He retched and closed his eyes.

"I'll make you sorry!" Sally chanted. "I can do terrible things to you!"

"I don't want to go to Terra," Curt said. He gathered up Pat's body and motioned Tim over beside him. "I want to go to Proxima VI."

Big Noodle struggled to make up his mind. Outside the room officials and Corpsmen were in cautious motion. A bedlam of sound and uncertainty rang up and down the corridors.

Sally's shrill voice rose over the rumble of sound as she tried to attract Big Noodle's attention. "You know what I'll do! You know what will happen to you!"

Big Noodle made his decision. He tried an abortive stab at Sally before turning to Curt; a ton of molten plastic transported from some Terran factory cascaded down on her in a hissing torrent. Sally's body dissolved, one arm raised and twitching, the echo of her voice still hanging in the air.

Big Noodle had acted, but the warp directed at him from the dying girl was already in existence. As Curt felt the air of space - transformation all around him, he caught a final glimpse of Big Noodle's torment. He had never known precisely what it was Sally dangled over the big idiot's head. Now he saw it and understood Big Noodle's hesitation. A high-pitched scream rattled from Big Noodle's throat and around Curt as the chamber ebbed away. Big Noodle altered and flowed as Sally's change engulfed him.

Curt realized, then, the amount of courage buried in the vegetable rolls of fat. Big Noodle had known the risk, taken it, and accepted—more or less—the consequences.

The vast body had become a mass of crawling spiders. What had been Big Noodle was now a mound of hairy, quivering beings, thousands of them, spiders without number, dropping off and clinging again, clustering and separating and reclustering.



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And then the chamber was gone. He was across.

IT was early afternoon. He lay for a time, half-buried in tangled vines. Insects hummed around him, seeking moisture from the stalks of foul-smelling flowers. The red-tinted sky baked in the mounting sunlight. Far off, an animal of some kind called mournfully.

Nearby, his son stirred. The boy got to his feet, wandered about aimlessly and finally approached his father.

Curt pulled himself up. His clothes were torn. Blood oozed down his cheek, into his mouth. He shook his head, shuddered, and looked around.

Pat's body lay a few feet off. A crumpled and broken thing, it was without life of any kind. A hollow husk, abandoned and deserted.

He made his way over to her. For a time he squatted on his haunches, gazing vacantly down at her. Then he leaned over, picked her up, and struggled to his feet.

"Come on," he said to Tim, "let's get started."

They walked a long time. Big Noodle had dropped them between villages, in the turgid chaos of the Proxima VI forests. Once he stopped in an open field and rested. Against the line of drooping trees a waver of blue smoke drifted. A kiln, perhaps. Or somebody clearing away the brush. He lifted Pat up in his arms again and continued on.

When he crashed from the underbrush and out into the road, the villagers were paralyzed with fright. Some of them raced off, a few remained, staring blankly at the man and the boy beside him.

"Who are you?" one of them demanded as he fumbled for a hack-knife. "What have you got there?"

They got a work-truck for him, allowed him to dump Pat in with the rough-cut lumber, and then drove him and his son to the nearest village. He wasn't far off, only a hundred miles. From the common store of the village he was given heavy work clothes and fed. Tim was bathed and cared for, and a general conference was called.

He sat at a huge, rough table, littered with remains of the midday meal. He knew their decision; he could preview it without trouble.

"She can't fix up anybody that far gone," the leader of the village explained to him. "The girl's whole upper ganglia and brain are gone, and most of the spinal column."

He listened, but didn't speak. Afterwards, he wangled a bat-



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tered truck, loaded Pat and Tim in, and started on.

HER village had been notified by short-wave radio. He was pulled from the truck by savage hands; a pandemonium of noise and fury boiled around him, excited faces distorted by grief and horror. Shouts, outraged shoves, questions, a blur of men and women milling and pushing until finally her brothers cleared a path for him to their home.

They laid her out on a table and examined her with shaking hands.

"It's useless," her father was saying to him. "And the old woman's gone, I think. That was years ago." The man gestured toward the mountains. "She lived up there—used to come down. Not for years." He grabbed Curt roughly. "It's too late, God damn it! She's dead! You can't bring her back!"

He listened to the words, still said nothing. He had no interest in predictions of any kind. When they had finished talking to him, he gathered up Pat's body, carried it back to the truck, called his son and continued on.

It grew cold and silent as the truck wheezily climbed the road into the mountains. Frigid air plucked at him; the road was obscured by dense clouds of mist that billowed up from the chalky soil. At one point a lumbering animal barred his way until he drove it off by throwing rocks at it. Finally the truck ran out of fuel and stopped. He got out, stood for a time, then woke up his son and continued on foot.

It was almost dark when he found the hut perched on a lip of rock. A fetid stench of offal and drying hides stung his nose as he staggered past heaps of discarded rubble, tin cans and boxes, rotting fabric and vermin-infested lumber.

The old woman was watering a patch of wretched vegetables. As he approached, she lowered her sprinkling can and turned toward him, wrinkled face tight with suspicion and wonder.

"I can't do it," she said flatly as she crouched over Pat's inert body. She ran her dry, leathery hands over the dead face, pulled aside the girl's shirt and kneaded the cold flesh at the base of the neck. She pushed aside the tangle of black hair and gripped the skull with her strong fingers. "No, I can't do a thing." Her voice was rusty and harsh in the night fog that billowed around them. "She's burned out. No tissue left to repair."

Curt made his cracked lips move. "Is there another?" he grated. "Any more Resurrectors here?"

The old woman struggled to



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her feet. "Nobody can help you, don't you understand? She's dead!"

He remained. He asked the question again and again. Finally there was a begrudging answer. Somewhere on the other side of the planet there was supposed to be a competitor. He gave the old woman his cigarettes and lighter and fountain pen, picked up the cold body and started back. Tim trailed after him, head drooping, body bent with fatigue.

"Come on," Curt ordered harshly. The old woman watched silently as they threaded their way down by the light of Proxima VI's two sullen, yellowed moons.

HE got only a quarter mile. In some way, without warning, her body was gone. He had lost her, dropped her along the way. Somewhere among the rubbish-littered rocks and weeds that fingered their way over the trail. Probably into one of the deep gorges that cut into the jagged side of the mountain.

He sat down on the ground and rested. There was nothing left. Fairchild had dwindled into the hands of the Corps. Big Noodle was destroyed by Sally. Sally was gone, too. The Colonies were open to the Terrans; their wall against projectiles had dissolved when Big Noodle died. And Pat.

There was a sound behind him. Panting with despair and fatigue, he turned only slightly. For a brief second he thought it was Tim catching up with him. He strained to see; the shape that emerged from the half-light was too tall, too sure-footed. A familiar shape.

"You're right," the old man said, the ancient Psi who had stood beside Fairchild. He came up, vast and awesome in the aged yellow moonlight. "There's no use trying to bring her back. It could be done, but it's too difficult. And there're other things for you and me to think about."

Curt scrambled off. Falling, sliding, slashed by the stones under him, he made his way blindly down the trail. Dirt rattled after him while choking, he struggled onto the level ground.

When he halted again, it was Tim who came after him. For an instant he thought it had been an illusion, a figment of his imagination. The old man was gone; he hadn't been there.

He didn't fully understand until he saw the change take place in front of him. And this time it went the other way. He realized that this one was a *Left*. And it was a familiar figure, but in a different way. A figure he remembered from the past.



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Where the boy of eight had stood, a wailing, fretful baby of sixteen months struggled and groped. Now the substitution had gone in the other direction . . . and he couldn't deny what his eyes saw.

"All right," he said, when the eight-year-old Tim reappeared and the baby was gone. But the boy remained only a moment. He vanished almost at once, and this time a new shape stood on the trail. A man in his middle thirties, a man Curt had never seen before.

A familiar man.

"*You're my son,*" Curt said.

"THAT'S right." The man appraised him in the dim light. "You realize that she can't be brought back, don't you? We have to get that out of the way before we can proceed."

Curt nodded wearily. "I know."

"Fine." Tim advanced toward him, hand out. "Then let's get back down. We have a lot to do. We middle and extreme Rights have been trying to get through for some time. It's been difficult to come back without the approval of the Center one. And in these cases the Center is too young to understand."

"So that's what he meant," Curt murmured as the two of them made their way along the road, toward the village. "The Others are himself, along his time-track."

"Left is previous Others," Tim answered. "Right, of course, is the future. You said that Precog and Precog made nothing. Now you know. They make the ultimate Precog—the ability to move through time."

"You Others were trying to get over. He'd see you and be frightened."

"It was very hard, but we knew eventually he'd grow old enough to comprehend. He built up an elaborate mythology. That is, we did. I did." Tim laughed. "You see, there still isn't an adequate terminology. There never is for a unique happening."

"I could change the future," Curt said, "because I could see into it. But I couldn't change the present. You can change the present by going back into the past. That's why that extreme Right Other, the old man, hung around Fairchild."

"That was our first successful crossing. We were finally able to induce the Center to take his two steps Right. That switched the two, but it took time."

"What's going to happen now?" Curt asked. "The war? The Separation? All this about Reynolds?"

"As you realized before, we can alter it by going back. It's dangerous. A simple change in



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the past may completely alter the present. The time-traveling talent is the most critical—and the most Promethean. Every other talent, without exception, can change only what's going to happen. I could wipe out everything that stands. I precede everyone and everything. Nothing can be used against me. I am always there first. I have always been there."

CURT was silent as they passed the abandoned, rusting truck. Finally he asked, "What is Anti-Psi? What did you have to do with that?"

"Not much," his son said. "You can take credit for bringing it out into the open, since we didn't begin operating until the last few hours. We came along in time to aid it—you saw us with Fairchild. We're *sponsoring* Anti-Psi. You'd be surprised to see some of the alternate time-paths on which Anti-Psi fails to get pushed forward. Your precog was right—they're not very pleasant."

"So I've had help lately."

"We're behind you, yes. And from now on, our help will increase. Always, we try to introduce balances. Stalemates, such as Anti-Psi. Right now, Reynolds is a little out of balance, but he can easily be checked. Steps are being taken. We're not infinite in power, of course. We're limited by our life-span, about seventy years. It's a strange feeling to be outside of time. You're outside of change, subject to no laws.

"It's like suddenly being lifted off the chess board and seeing everybody as pieces—seeing the whole Universe as a game of black and white squares—with everybody and every object stuck on his space-time spot. We're off the board; we can reach down from above. Adjust, alter the position of the men, change the game without the pieces knowing. From outside."

"And you won't bring her back?" Curt appealed.

"You can't expect me to be too sympathetic toward the girl," his son said. "After all, Julie is my mother. I know now what they used to mean by *mill of the gods*. I wish we could grind less small . . . I wish we could spare some of those who get caught in the gears. But if you could see it as we do, you'd understand. We have a universe hanging in the balance; it's an awfully big board."

"A board so big that one person doesn't count?" Curt asked, agonized.

His son looked concerned. Curt remembered looking like that himself when trying to explain something to the boy that was beyond a child's comprehension.



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He hoped Tim would do a better job than he'd been able to do.

"Not that," Tim said. "To us, she isn't gone. She's still there, on another part of the board that you can't see. She always was there. She always will be. No piece ever falls off the board . . . no matter how small."

"For you," said Curt.

"Yes. We're outside the board. It may be that our talent will be shared by everybody. When that happens, there will be no misunderstanding of tragedy and death."

"And meanwhile?" Curt ached with the tension of *willing* Tim to agree. "I don't have the talent. To me, she's dead. The place she occupied on the board is empty. Julie can't fill it. Nobody can."

Tim considered. It looked like deep thought, but Curt could sense that his son was moving restlessly along the time-paths, seeking a rebuttal. His eyes focused again on his father and he nodded sadly.

"I can't show you where she is on the board," he said. "And your life is vacant along every path except one."

Curt heard someone coming through the brush. He turned—and then Pat was in his arms.

"This one," Tim said.

—PHILIP K. DICK

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# FORECAST

How long Clifford D. Simak's writing streak will last, even he can't say, but while it continues, the results are wonderful—as you'll discover next month in his almost-novella-length HOW-2. If you have anything like a home workshop, you yourself are a direct progenitor of the story! For there are many trends so quiet and taken for granted today that they are almost unnoticeable . . . and yet they may shape the future more decisively than the blatantly obvious alphabet-bombs, snorkel subs, even rocketry! HOW-2 is a head-spinning case of a man in enthusiastic possession of the ultimate gadget . . . and vice versa!

Back, too, comes F. L. Wallace with BIG ANCESTOR, a novelet in which mankind searches for its incredibly high-born, noble, downright regal antecedents . . . and comes up with a ghastly blot on the family escutcheon that not even time can erase!

Don't be too astonished to find another novelet in the lineup, which can't be predicted until the issue is put together, but you can count on an exciting fistful of short stories, as well as Willy Ley's FOR YOUR INFORMATION and our regular features. But why wait for the issue to reach the stands when you can get it at least ten days before . . . and a hefty bonus to boot! In other words, take advantage of our special offer, which you'll find advertised elsewhere in the book!



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# GHOST V

By ROBERT SHECKLEY

*Delousing planets was humdrum —but not the one that wanted to exterminate exterminators!*

"HE'S reading our sign now," Gregor said, his long bony face pressed against the peephole in the office door.

"Let me see," Arnold said.

Gregor pushed him back. "He's going to knock — no, he's changed his mind. He's leaving."

Arnold returned to his desk and laid out another game of solitaire. Gregor kept watch at the peephole.

They had constructed the peephole out of sheer boredom, three months after forming their partnership and renting the office. During that time, the AAA ACE PLANET DECONTAMINATION SERVICE had had no business—in spite of being first in the telephone book. Planetary decontamination was an old, established line, completely monopolized by two large outfits. It was discouraging for a small new firm run by two

Illustrated by KOSSIN



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young men with big ideas and a lot of unpaid-for equipment.

"He's coming back," Gregor called. "*Quick*—look busy and important!"

Arnold swept his cards into a drawer and just finished buttoning his lab gown when the knock came.

Their visitor was a short, bald, tired-looking man. He stared at them dubiously.

"You decontaminate planets?"

"That is correct, sir," Gregor said, pushing away a pile of papers and shaking the man's moist hand. "I am Richard Gregor. This is my partner, Doctor Frank Arnold."

ARNOLD, impressively garbed in a white lab gown and black horn-rimmed glasses, nodded absently and resumed his examination of a row of ancient, crusted test tubes.

"Kindly be seated, Mister—"

"Ferngraum."

"Mr. Ferngraum. I think we can handle just about anything you require," Gregor said heartily. "Flora or fauna control, cleansing atmospheres, purifying water supply, sterilizing soil, stability testing, volcano and earthquake control — anything you need to make a planet fit for human habitation."

Ferngraum still looked dubious. "I'm going to level with you. I've got a problem planet on my hands."

Gregor nodded confidently. "Problems are our business."

"I'm a free-lance real-estate broker," Ferngraum said. "You know how it works—buy a planet, sell a planet, everyone makes a living. Usually I stick with the scrub worlds and let my buyers do their decontaminating. But a few months ago I had a chance to buy a real quality planet—took it right out from under the noses of the big operators."

Ferngraum mopped his forehead unhappily.

"It's a beautiful place," he continued, with no enthusiasm whatsoever. "Average temperature of 71 degrees. Mountainous, but fertile. Waterfalls, rainbows, all that sort of thing. And no fauna at all."

"Sounds perfect," Gregor said. "Micro-organisms?"

"Nothing dangerous."

"Then what's wrong with the place?"

Ferngraum looked embarrassed. "Maybe you heard about it. The government catalogue number is RJC-5. But everyone else calls it Ghost V."

Gregor raised an eyebrow. "Ghost" was an odd nickname for a planet, but he had heard odder. After all, you had to call them something. There were thousands of planet-bearing suns



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within spaceship range, many of them inhabitable, or potentially inhabitable. And there were plenty of people from the civilized worlds who wanted to colonize them. Religious sects, political minorities, philosophic groups—or just plain pioneers, out to make a fresh start.

"I don't believe I've heard of it," Gregor said.

Ferngraum squirmed uncomfortably in his chair. "I should have listened to my wife. But no—I was gonna be a big operator. Paid ten times my usual price for Ghost V and now I'm stuck with it."

"But what's *wrong* with it?" Gregor asked.

"It seems to be haunted," Ferngraum said in despair.

FERGRAUM had radar-checked his planet, then leased it to a combine of farmers from Dijon VI. The eight-man advance guard landed and, within a day, began to broadcast garbled reports about demons, ghouls, vampires, dinosaurs and other inimical fauna.

When a relief ship came for them, all were dead. An autopsy report stated that the gashes, cuts and marks on their bodies could indeed have been made by almost anything, even demons, ghouls, vampires or dinosaurs, if such existed.

Ferngraum was fined for improper decontamination. The farmers dropped their lease. But he managed to lease it to a group of sun-worshipers from Opal II.

The sun-worshipers were cautious. They sent their equipment, but only three men accompanied it, to scout out trouble. The men set up camp, unpacked, and declared the place a paradise. They radioed the home group to come at once—then, suddenly, there was a wild scream and radio silence.

A patrol ship went to Ghost V, buried the three mangled bodies, and departed in five minutes flat.

"And that did it," Ferngraum said. "Now no one will touch it at any price. Space crews refuse to land on it. And I still don't know what happened."

He sighed deeply and looked at Gregor. "It's your baby, if you want it."

Gregor and Arnold excused themselves and went into the anteroom. Arnold whooped at once, "We've got a job!"

"Yeah," Gregor said, "but what a job."

"We wanted the tough ones," Arnold pointed out. "If we lick this, we're established—to say nothing of the profit we'll make on a percentage basis."

"You seem to forget," Gregor said. "*I'm* the one who has to



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actually land on the planet. All you do is sit here and interpret my data."

"That's the way we set it up," Arnold reminded him. "I'm the research department—you're the troubleshooter. Remember?"

Gregor remembered. Ever since childhood, he had been sticking his neck out, while Arnold stayed home and told him why he was sticking his neck out.

"I don't like it," he said.

"You don't believe in ghosts, do you?"

"No, of course not."

"Well, we can handle anything else. Faint heart ne'er won fair profit."

Gregor shrugged his shoulders. They went back to Ferngraum.

In half an hour, they had worked out their terms—a large percentage of future development profits if they succeeded, a forfeiture clause if they failed.

Gregor walked to the door with Ferngraum. "By the way, sir," he asked, "how did you happen to come to us?"

"No one else would handle it," Ferngraum said, looking extremely pleased with himself. "Good luck."

THREE days later, Gregor was aboard a rickety space freighter, bound for Ghost V. He spent his time studying reports on the two colonization attempts and reading survey after survey on supernatural phenomena.

They didn't help at all. No trace of animal life had been found on Ghost V. And no proof of the existence of supernatural creatures had been discovered anywhere in the Galaxy.

Gregor pondered this, then checked his weapons as the freighter spiraled into the region of Ghost V. He was carrying an arsenal large enough to start a small war and win it.

*If* he could find something to shoot at . . .

The captain of the freighter brought his ship to within several thousand feet of the smiling green surface of the planet, but no closer. Gregor parachuted his equipment to the site of the last two camps, shook hands with the captain and 'chuted himself down.

He landed safely and looked up. The freighter was streaking into space as though the furies were after it.

He was alone on Ghost V.

After checking his equipment for breakage, he radioed Arnold that he had landed safely. Then, with drawn blaster, he inspected the sun-worshipers' camp.

They had set themselves up at the base of a mountain, beside a small, crystal-clear lake. The pre-fabs were in perfect condition.



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No storms had ever damaged them, because Ghost V was blessed with a beautifully even climate. But they looked pathetically lonely.

Gregor made a careful check of one. Clothes were still neatly packed in cabinets, pictures were hung on the wall and there was even a curtain on one window. In a corner of the room, a case of toys had been opened for the arrival of the main party's children.

A water-pistol, a top and a bag of marbles had spilled onto the floor.

Evening was coming, so Gregor dragged his equipment into the pre-fab and made his preparations. He rigged an alarm system and adjusted it so finely that even a roach would set it off. He put up a radar alarm to scan the immediate area. He unpacked his arsenal, laying the heavy rifles within easy reach, but keeping a hand-blaster in his belt. Then, satisfied, he ate a leisurely supper.

Outside, the evening drifted into night. The warm and dreamy land grew dark. A gentle breeze ruffled the surface of the lake and rustled silkily in the tall grass.

It was all very peaceful.

The settlers must have been hysterical types, he decided. They had probably panicked and killed each other.

AFTER checking his alarm system one last time, Gregor threw his clothes onto a chair, turned off the lights and climbed into bed. The room was illuminated by starlight, stronger than moonlight on Earth. His blaster was under his pillow. All was well with the world.

He had just begun to doze off when he became aware that he was not alone in the room.

That was impossible. His alarm system hadn't gone off. The radar was still humming peacefully.

Yet every nerve in his body was shrieking alarm. He eased the blaster out and looked around.

A man was standing in a corner of the room.

There was no time to consider how he had come. Gregor aimed the blaster and said, "Okay, raise your hands," in a quiet, resolute voice.

The figure didn't move.

Gregor's finger tightened on the trigger, then suddenly relaxed. He recognized the man. It was his own clothing, heaped on a chair, distorted by starlight and his own imagination.

He grinned and lowered the blaster. The pile of clothing began to stir faintly. Gregor felt a faint breeze from the window and continued to grin.

Then the pile of clothing stood up, stretched itself and began to



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walk toward him purposefully.

Frozen to his bed, he watched the disembodied clothing, assembled roughly into manlike form, advance on him.

When it was halfway across the room and its empty sleeves were reaching for him, he began to blast.

And kept on blasting, for the rags and remnants slithered toward him as if filled with a life of their own. Flaming bits of cloth crowded toward his face and a belt tried to coil around his legs. He had to burn everything to ashes before the attack stopped.

When it was over, Gregor turned on every light he could find. He brewed a pot of coffee and poured in most of a bottle of brandy. Somehow, he resisted an urge to kick his useless alarm system to pieces. Instead, he radioed his partner.

"That's very interesting," Arnold said, after Gregor had brought him up to date. "Animation! Very interesting indeed."

"I hoped it would amuse you," Gregor answered bitterly. After several shots of brandy, he was beginning to feel abandoned and abused.

"Did anything else happen?"

"Not yet."

"Well, take care. I've got a theory. Have to do some research on it. By the way, some crazy bookie is laying five to one against you."

"Really?"

"Yeah. I took a piece of it."

"Did you bet for me or against me?" Gregor asked, worried.

"*For* you, of course," Arnold said indignantly. "We're partners, aren't we?"

They signed off and Gregor brewed another pot of coffee. He was not planning on any more sleep that night. It was comforting to know that Arnold had bet on him. But, then, Arnold was a notoriously bad gambler.

BY daylight, Gregor was able to get a few hours of fitful sleep. In the early afternoon he awoke, found some clothes and began to explore the sun-worshipers' camp.

Toward evening, he found something. On the wall of a pre-fab, the word "Tgasklit" had been hastily scratched. *Tgasklit*. It meant nothing to him, but he relayed it to Arnold at once.

He then searched his pre-fab carefully, set up more lights, tested the alarm system and recharged his blaster.

Everything seemed in order. With regret, he watched the sun go down, hoping he would live to see it rise again. Then he settled himself in a comfortable chair, and tried to do some constructive thinking.



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There was no animal life here —nor were there any walking plants, intelligent rocks or giant brains dwelling in the planet's core. Ghost V hadn't even a moon for someone to hide on.

And he couldn't believe in ghosts or demons. He knew that supernatural happenings tended to break down, under detailed examination, into eminently natural events. The ones that didn't break down—stopped. Ghosts just wouldn't stand still and let a nonbeliever examine them. The phantom of the castle was invariably on vacation when a scientist showed up with cameras and tape recorders.

That left another possibility. Suppose someone wanted this planet, but wasn't prepared to pay Ferngraum's price? Couldn't this someone hide here, frighten the settlers, kill them if necessary in order to drive down the price?

That seemed logical. You could even explain the behavior of his clothes that way. Static electricity, correctly used, could—

SOMETHING was standing in front of him. His alarm system, as before, hadn't gone off.

Gregor looked up slowly. The thing in front of him was about ten feet tall and roughly human in shape, except for its crocodile head. It was colored a bright crimson and had purple stripes running lengthwise on its body. In one claw, it was carrying a large brown can.

"Hello," it said.

"Hello," Gregor gulped. His blaster was on a table, only two feet away. He wondered, would the thing attack if he reached for it?

"What's your name?" Gregor asked, with the calmness of deep shock.

"I'm the Purple-striped Grabber," the thing said. "I grab things."

"How interesting." Gregor's hand began to creep toward the blaster.

"I grab things named Richard Gregor," the Grabber told him in its bright, ingenuous voice. "And I usually eat them in chocolate sauce." It held up the brown can and Gregor saw that it was labeled *Smig's Chocolate — An Ideal Sauce to Use with Gregors, Arnolds and Flynns.*

Gregor's fingers touched the butt of the blaster. He asked, "Were you planning to eat me?"

"Oh, yes," the Grabber said.

Gregor had the gun now. He flipped off the safety catch and fired. The radiant blast cascaded off the Grabber's chest and singed the floor, the walls and Gregor's eyebrows.

"That won't hurt me," the Grabber explained. "I'm too tall."



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The blaster dropped from Gregor's fingers. The Grabber leaned forward.

"I'm not going to eat you now," the Grabber said.

"No?" Gregor managed to enunciate.

"No. I can only eat you tomorrow, on May first. Those are the rules. I just came to ask a favor."

"What is it?"

The Grabber smiled winningly. "Would you be a good sport and eat a few apples? They flavor the flesh so wonderfully."

And, with that, the striped monster vanished.

WITH shaking hands, Gregor worked the radio and told Arnold everything that had happened.

"Hmm," Arnold said. "Purple-striped Grabber, eh? I think that clinches it. Everything fits."

"What fits? What is it?"

"First, do as I say. I want to make sure."

Obeying Arnold's instructions, Gregor unpacked his chemical equipment and laid out a number of test tubes, retorts and chemicals. He stirred, mixed, added and subtracted as directed and finally put the mixture on the stove to heat.

"Now," Gregor said, coming back to the radio, "tell me what's going on."

"Certainly. I looked up the word 'Tgasklit.' It's Opalian. It means many-toothed ghost. The sun-worshipers were from Opal. What does that suggest to you?"

"They were killed by a home-town ghost," Gregor replied nastily. "It must have stowed away on their ship. Maybe there was a curse and—"

"Calm down," Arnold said. "There aren't any ghosts in this. Is the solution boiling yet?"

"No."

"Tell me when it does. Now let's take your animated clothing. Does it remind you of anything?"

Gregor thought. "Well," he said, "when I was a kid — no, that's ridiculous."

"Out with it," Arnold insisted.

"When I was a kid, I never left clothing on a chair. In the dark, it always looked like a man or a dragon or something. I guess everyone's had that experience. But it doesn't explain—"

"Sure it does! Remember the Purple-striped Grabber now?"

"No. Why should I?"

"Because you invented him! Remember? We must have been eight or nine, you and me and Jimmy Flynn. We invented the most horrible monster you could think of—he was our own personal monster and he only wanted to eat you or me or Jimmy—flavored with chocolate sauce. But only on the first of every



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month, when the report cards were due. You had to use the magic word to get rid of him."

THEN Gregor remembered and wondered how he could ever have forgotten. How many nights had he stayed up in fearful expectation of the Grabber? It had made bad report cards seem very unimportant.

"Is the solution boiling?" Arnold asked.

"Yes," said Gregor, glancing obediently at the stove.

"What color is it?"

"A sort of greenish blue. No, it's more blue than—"

"Right. You can pour it out. I want to run a few more tests, but I think we've got it licked."

"Got *what* licked? Would you do a little explaining?"

"It's obvious. The planet has no animal life. There are no ghosts, or, at least, none solid enough to kill off a party of armed men. Hallucination was the answer, so I looked for something that would produce it. I found plenty. Aside from all the drugs on Earth, there are about a dozen hallucination-forming gases in the Catalogue of Alien Trace Elements. There are depressants, stimulants, stuff that'll make you feel like a genius or an earthworm or an eagle. This particular one corresponds to Longstead 42 in the catalogue. It's a heavy, transparent, odorless gas, not harmful physically. It's an imagination stimulant."

"You mean I was just having hallucinations? I tell you—"

"Not quite that simple," Arnold cut in. "Longstead 42 works directly on the subconscious. It releases your strongest subconscious fears, the childhood terrors you've been suppressing. It animates them. And that's what you've been seeing."

"Then there's actually nothing here?" Gregor asked.

"Nothing physical. But the hallucinations are real enough to whoever is having them."

Gregor reached over for another bottle of brandy. This called for a celebration.

"It won't be hard to decontaminate Ghost V," Arnold went on confidently. "We can cancel the Longstead 42 with no difficulty. And then—we'll be rich, partner!"

Gregor suggested a toast, then thought of something disturbing. "If they're just hallucinations, what happened to the settlers?"

Arnold was silent for a moment. "Well," he said finally, "Longstead may have a tendency to stimulate the mortido—the death-instinct. The settlers must have gone crazy. Killed each other."

"And no survivors?"

"Sure, why not? The last ones



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alive committed suicide or died of wounds. Don't worry about it. I'm chartering a ship immediately and coming out to run those tests. Relax. I'll pick you up in a day or two."

Gregor signed off. He allowed himself the rest of the bottle of brandy that night. It seemed only fair. The mystery of Ghost V was solved and they were going to be rich. Soon *he* would be able to hire a man to land on strange planets for him, while *he* sat home and gave instructions over a radio.

HE awoke late the next day with a hangover. Arnold's ship hadn't arrived yet, so he packed his equipment and waited. By evening, there was still no ship. He sat in the doorway of the pre-fab and watched a gaudy sunset, then went inside and made dinner.

The problem of the settlers still bothered him, but he determined not to worry about it. Undoubtedly there was a logical answer.

After dinner, he stretched out on a bed. He had barely closed his eyes when he heard someone cough apologetically.

"Hello," said the Purple-striped Grabber.

His own personal hallucination had returned to eat him. "Hello, old chap," Gregor said cheerfully, without a bit of fear or worry.

"Did you eat the apples?"

"Dreadfully sorry. I forgot."

"Oh, well." The Grabber tried to conceal his disappointment. "I brought the chocolate sauce." He held up the can.

Gregor smiled. "You can leave now," he said. "I know you're just a figment of my imagination. You can't hurt me."

"I'm not going to hurt you," the Grabber said. "I'm just going to eat you."

He walked up to Gregor. Gregor held his ground, smiling, although he wished the Grabber didn't appear so solid and undreamlike. The Grabber leaned over and bit his arm experimentally.

He jumped back and looked at his arm. There were toothmarks on it. Blood was oozing out—real blood—*his* blood.

The colonists had been bitten, gashed, torn and ripped.

At that moment, Gregor remembered an exhibition of hypnotism he had once seen. The hypnotist had told the subject he was putting a lighted cigarette on his arm. Then he had touched the spot with a pencil.

Within seconds, an angry red blister had appeared on the subject's arm, because he *believed* he had been burned. If your subconscious thinks you're dead, you're dead. If it orders the stig-



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mata of toothmarks, they are there.

*He* didn't believe in the Grabber.

But his subconscious did.

Gregor tried to run for the door. The Grabber cut him off. It seized him in its claws and bent to reach his neck.

The magic word! What was it?

Gregor shouted, "Alphoisto?"

"Wrong word," said the Grabber. "Please don't squirm."

"*Regnastikio!*"

"Nope. Stop wriggling and it'll be over before you—"

"*Voorshpellhappilo!*"

The Grabber let out a scream of pain and released him. It bounded high into the air and vanished.

GREGOR collapsed into a chair. That had been close. Too close. It would be a particularly stupid way to die — rent by his own death-desiring subconscious, slashed by his own imagination, killed by his own conviction. It was fortunate he had remembered the word. Now if Arnold would only hurry . . .

He heard a low chuckle of amusement.

It came from the blackness of a half-opened closet door, touching off an almost forgotten memory. He was nine years old again, and the Shadower—*his* Shadower—was a strange, thin, grisly creature who hid in doorways, slept under beds and attacked only in the dark.

"Turn out the lights," the Shadower said.

"Not a chance," Gregor retorted, drawing his blaster. As long as the lights were on, he was safe.

"You'd better turn them off."

"No!"

"Very well. Egan, Megan, Degan!"

Three little creatures scampered into the room. They raced to the nearest light bulb, flung themselves on it and began to gulp hungrily.

The room was growing darker.

Gregor blasted at them each time they approached a light. Glass shattered, but the nimble creatures darted out of the way.

And then Gregor realized what he had done. The creatures couldn't actually eat light. Imagination can't make any impression on inanimate matter. He had *imagined* that the room was growing dark and—

He had shot out his light bulbs! His own destructive subconscious had tricked him.

Now the Shadower stepped out. Leaping from shadow to shadow, he came toward Gregor.

The blaster had no effect. Gregor tried frantically to think of the magic word—and terrifiedly remembered that no magic word banished the Shadower.



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He backed away, the Shadower advancing, until he was stopped by a packing case. The Shadower towered over him and Gregor shrank to the floor and closed his eyes.

His hand came in contact with something cold. He was leaning against the packing case of toys for the settlers' children. And he was holding a water pistol.

Gregor brandished it. The Shadower backed away, eying the weapon with apprehension.

Quickly, Gregor ran to the tap and filled the pistol. He directed a deadly stream of water into the creature.

The Shadower howled in agony and vanished.

Gregor smiled tightly and slipped the empty gun into his belt.

A water pistol was the right weapon to use against an imaginary monster.

IT was nearly dawn when the ship landed and Arnold stepped out. Without wasting any time, he set up his tests. By midday, it was done and the element definitely established as Longstead 42. He and Gregor packed up immediately and blasted off.

Once they were in space, Gregor told his partner everything that had happened.

"Pretty rough," said Arnold softly, but with deep feeling.

Gregor could smile with modest heroism, now that he was safely off Ghost V. "Could have been worse," he said.

"How?"

"Suppose Jimmy Flynn were here. There was a kid who could *really* dream up monsters. Remember the Grumbler?"

"All I remember is the nightmares it gave me," Arnold said.

They were on their way home. Arnold jotted down some notes for an article entitled "The Death Instinct on Ghost V: *An Examination of Subconscious Stimulation, Hysteria, and Mass Hallucination in Producing Physical Stigmata.*" Then he went to the control room to set the autopilot.

Gregor threw himself on a couch, determined to get his first decent night's sleep since landing on Ghost V. He had barely dozed off when Arnold hurried in, his face pasty with terror.

"I think there's something in the control room," he said.

Gregor sat up. "There can't be. We're off the—"

There was a low growl from the control room.

"Oh, my God!" Arnold gasped. He concentrated furiously for a few seconds. "I know. I left the airlocks open when I landed. We're still breathing Ghost V air!"

And there, framed in the open doorway, was an immense gray



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creature with red spots on its hide. It had an amazing number of arms, legs, tentacles, claws and teeth, plus two tiny wings on its back. It walked slowly toward them, mumbling and groaning.

They both recognized it as the Grumbler.

GREGOR dashed forward and slammed the door in its face.

"We should be safe in here," he panted. "That door is airtight. But how will we pilot the ship?"

"We won't," Arnold said. "We'll have to trust the robot-pilot—unless we can figure out some way of getting that thing out of there."

They noticed that a faint smoke was beginning to seep through the sealed edges of the door.

"What's that?" Arnold asked, with a sharp edge of panic in his voice.

Gregor frowned. "You remember, don't you? The Grumbler can get into any room. There's no way of keeping him out."

"I don't remember anything about him," Arnold said. "Does he eat people?"

"No. As I recall, he just mangles them thoroughly."

The smoke was beginning to solidify into the immense gray shape of the Grumbler. They retreated into the next compartment and sealed the door. Within seconds, the thin smoke was leaking through.

"This is ridiculous," Arnold said, biting his lip. "To be hunted by an imaginary monster—wait! You've still got your water pistol, haven't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Give it to me!"

Arnold hurried over to a water tank and filled the pistol. The Grumbler had taken form again and was lumbering toward them, groaning unhappily. Arnold raked it with a stream of water.

The Grumbler kept on advancing.

"Now it's all coming back to me," Gregor said. "A water pistol never could stop the Grumbler."

They backed into the next room and slammed the door. Behind them was only the bunkroom, with nothing behind that but the deadly vacuum of space.

Gregor asked, "Isn't there something you can do about the atmosphere?"

Arnold shook his head. "It's dissipating now. But it takes about twenty hours for the affects of Longstead to wear off."

"Haven't you any antidote?"

"No."

ONCE again the Grumbler was materializing, and neither silently nor pleasantly.



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"How can we kill it?" Arnold asked. "There *must* be a way. Magic words? How about a wooden sword?"

Gregor shook his head. "I remember the Grumbler now," he said unhappily.

"What kills it?"

"It can't be destroyed by water pistols, cap guns, firecrackers, slingshots, stink bombs, or any other childhood weapon. The Grumbler is absolutely unkillable."

"That Flynn and his damned imagination! Why did we have to talk about him? How do you get rid of it then?"

"I told you. You don't. It just has to go away of its own accord."

The Grumbler was full size now. Gregor and Arnold hurried into the tiny bunk room and slammed their last door.

"*Think,* Gregor," Arnold pleaded. "No kid invents a monster without a defense of some sort. *Think!*"

"The Grumbler cannot be killed," Gregor said.

The red-spotted monster was taking shape again. Gregor thought back over all the midnight horrors he had ever known. He *must* have done something as a child to neutralize the power of the unknown.

And then—almost too late—he remembered.

UNDER auto-pilot controls, the ship flashed Earthward with the Grumbler as complete master. He marched up and down the empty corridors and floated through steel partitions into cabins and cargo compartments, moaning, and groaning and cursing because he could not get at any victim.

The ship reached the Solar System and took up an automatic orbit around the Moon.

Gregor peered out cautiously, ready to duck back if necessary. There was no sinister shuffling, no moaning or groaning, no hungry mist seeping under the door or through the walls.

"All clear," he called out to Arnold. "The Grumbler's gone."

Safe within the ultimate defense against night-horrors—wrapped in blankets that had covered their heads—they climbed out of their bunks.

"I told you the water pistol wouldn't do any good," Gregor said.

Arnold gave him a sick grin and put the pistol in his pocket. "I'm hanging onto it. If I ever get married and have a kid, it's going to be his first present."

"Not for any of mine," said Gregor. He patted the bunk affectionately. "You can't beat blankets over the head for protection."

—ROBERT SHECKLEY



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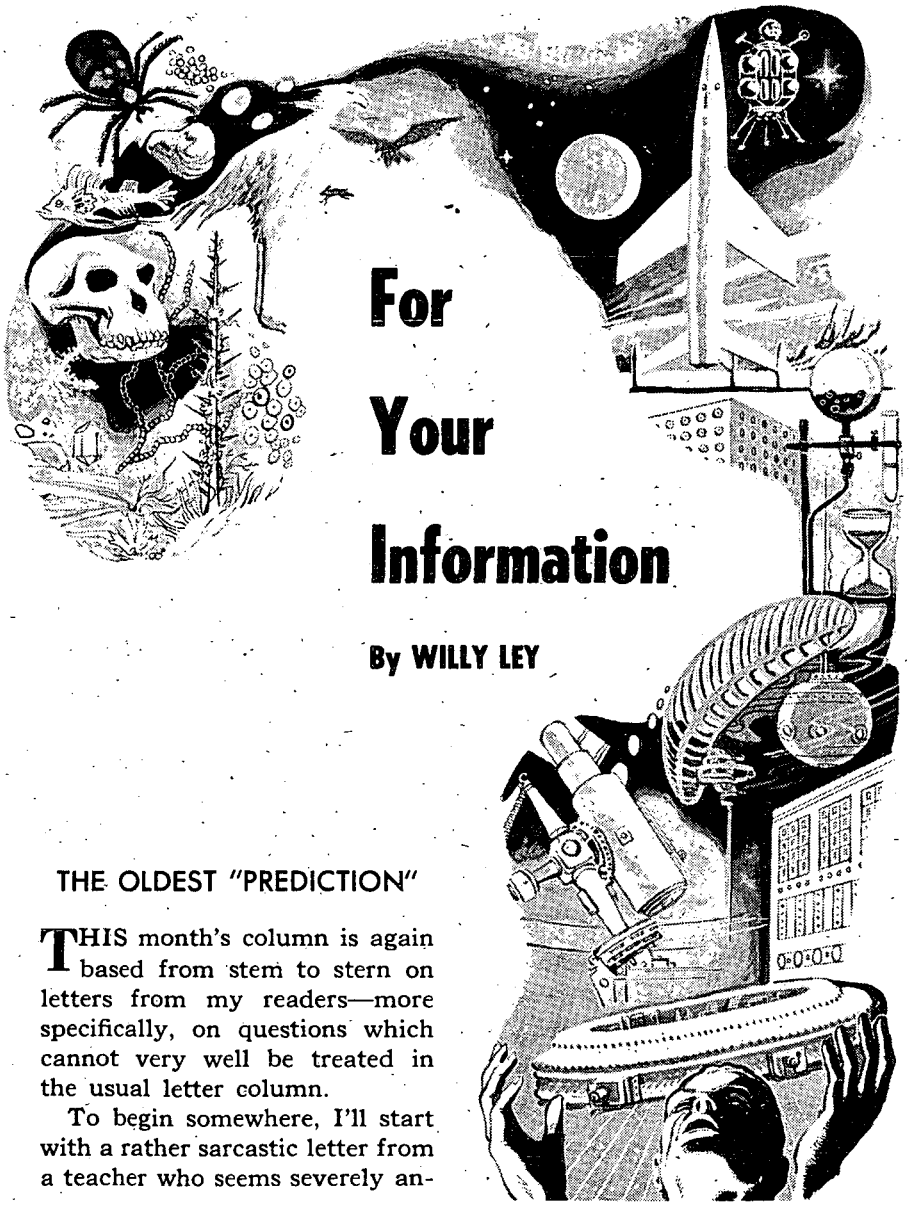

# For Your Information

By WILLY LEY

## THE OLDEST "PREDICTION"

THIS month's column is again based from stem to stern on letters from my readers—more specifically, on questions which cannot very well be treated in the usual letter column.

To begin somewhere, I'll start with a rather sarcastic letter from a teacher who seems severely an-



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noyed by the reading habits of some of her pupils.

"If you science fictionists," she wrote, "call some vague statements in one of Jules Verne's stories a prediction of the periscope and some remarks about unbreakable glass a prediction of transparent plastics, why don't you call Munchausen's (*sic*) story about the post horn in which the melodies froze until thawed out a prediction of the gramophone?"

You're perfectly right, madam —why not, indeed? Let's proceed to do exactly as you ironically suggest.

THE theme has been considered sufficiently meritorious to be treated at length in an erudite paper with the title *Antiphanes und Münchhausen* by the Historic-Philosophical Department of the Academy of Sciences of Vienna. The story of the "frozen words" did not occur only in the fabulous Baron's fabulous adventures, but goes back to the "pseudo - Mandeville" and, via Rabelais, to classical antiquity, the trace ending (for the present) at about 400 B.C. The oldest known source is Antiphanes Bergaios, who must not be confused with the Antiphanes who was a playwright of Athens.

Circumstances vary in the many different versions, but the idea is always the same: the preservation of sounds, particularly speech.

The most appealing version, in my opinion, is the one of Baldassare Castiglione, who died in 1529. He tells it as the "true experience" of an Italian merchant of Lucca who, in the course of his travels and trading, had come to Poland.

"Since he was in Poland, he decided to buy a large number of sable pelts which he wanted to bring back to Italy for a big profit. Because the King of Poland and the Duke of Muscovy were at war, he could not travel to Moscow personally, but succeeded, through intermediaries, in having a few Muscovite merchants come to the border with their sables. When he came to the shores of the Borysthenes (Dniepr river), he found it frozen as hard as a stone.

"The two parties signaled to each other across the frozen river and the Muscovites began to shout the prices they demanded for their sables. But the cold was so intense that the merchant of Lucca and his interpreters could not hear the words, for they froze before they had traversed the width of the river. The Poles, who were used to this occurrence, decided to light a large bonfire in the middle of the river because, they reasoned, the words had re-



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mained warm for about this distance. The river was frozen so hard that it could easily stand the fire.

"When the bonfire in the middle of the river was lighted, the words which had been frozen an hour earlier began to thaw and they could be understood clearly even though their originators had departed. The merchant decided, however, that the prices asked were too high and discarded the project, returning home without any sables."

I grant that it's impossible to consider this a direct and explicit prediction of the phonograph. But the idea is identical; we *have* learned how to "freeze" words on wax and tape.

Verne's description of the periscope is anything but vague; there is no important difference between his prediction and the reality.

He was necessarily less clear about plastics, for only one, celluloid, was in existence in his day. Nevertheless, he used that as a basis for extrapolation, envisioning a stronger and better substance. So did the chemists who brought about our present-day plastics.

However, my irritated correspondent misreads the function of science fiction. Its purpose is to explore entertainingly, not to predict.

But I will make a personal prediction: You, madam, will live to see many of its guesses come true. You already have, but you will see more.

## IMPACT END OF TRAJECTORY

RECENTLY I had several letters from British readers asking for clarification of a number of points having to do with the impact end of a V-2 trajectory. My correspondents did not live in London when the V-2 were falling out of the stratosphere and do not live there now, but they talked to people who had been there during the rocket attack. Apparently they got quite contradictory reports and finally drew up a short list of questions which might be of general interest.

One of my correspondents states that an informant insists that at least some of the V-2s were equipped with a proximity fuze. He must be mistaken, for we have the word of the former commanding officer of the Peenemünde Institute, General Dr. Dornberger, that the Germans did not have a proximity fuze. The concept was familiar to them and they had laboratory models, but they did not progress to production. The warheads of the rockets were armed with impact fuzes.



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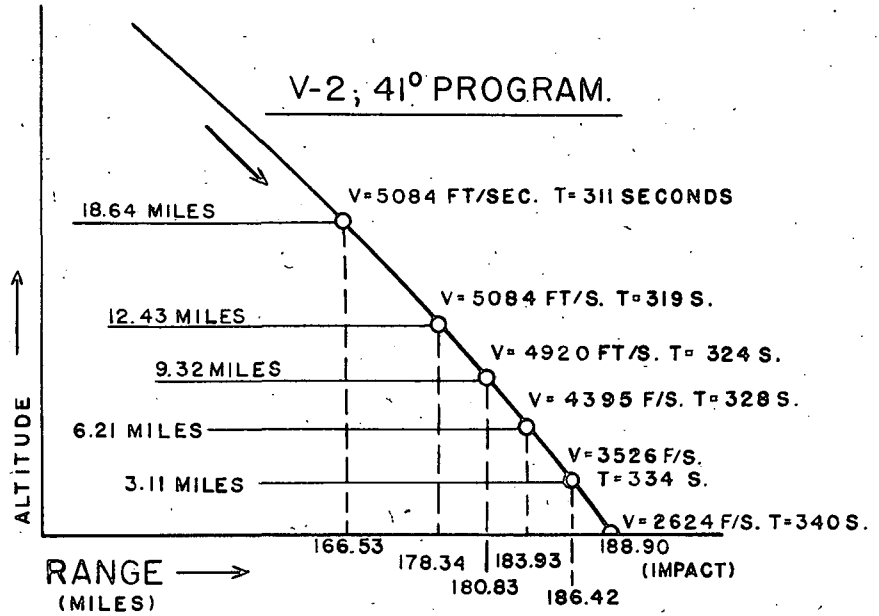


Figures along trajectory show velocity V in feet per second and time T elapsed since takeoff. "41° Program" refers to angle of firing (after vertical takeoff). It was 41 degrees of arc from the vertical.

Another item of disagreement that can be settled is the angle at which the rockets fell—"some say they came in slantwise and others say they arrived vertically." For an answer, look at the diagram drawn according to a set of available figures. The rocket clearly entered the denser layers of the atmosphere at a slant. For the last six miles, the trajectory became slightly steeper, but not anywhere near vertical. However, to an observer half a mile beyond the impact point, more or less directly in the line of fire, this might have *looked* vertical.

It must be stated here that it was apparently not at all difficult to see a V-2 rocket approach in daylight, provided you knew in which direction to look and when, and provided also, of course, that there was no dense overcast.

The Germans fired about 150



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rockets from the artillery proving ground of Blizna in Poland and *placed their own test evaluation staff in the target area.*

The theory behind this surprising practice was that, in firing over a range of nearly 200 miles, the precise target would not be hit, but that the missiles would fall close enough to be easily observed. It worked that way, too. The impacts took place between 1000 feet and three miles from the observers. They were informed by radio when a rocket was under way and knew that impact would take place about five minutes and 20 seconds later. Half a minute before the impact time, they would look up and catch it in their glasses.

ONE discrepancy in the statements that is still not completely settled is night observation. If any actual eyewitnesses read this, I'd like to hear from them.

During the war, some Londoners said, and British newspapers reported it, that on occasion a rocket had been seen descending "glowing red hot." Experiments have shown that some portions of the sheet-steel skin do grow hot enough by air friction to reach a temperature which would be described as red hot. But the rocket as a whole did not. The Germans who spent weeks in the target area during their own test firings never saw anything like that.

Dr. Dornberger reports one case in which he followed virtually the whole trajectory of a test rocket, from takeoff to almost impact, with his field glasses after dark. At one point, he wondered what it was he still saw and realized that it was the four graphite vanes in the exhaust blast. The exhaust blast had winked out minutes ago, but during the 65 seconds it had been in operation, the four graphite vanes had been raised to white heat and remained visible for the whole duration of the flight.

Maybe this is the explanation, but possibly the misunderstanding arose in another manner. During test shots of V-2 rockets and also in at least one Viking shot, the timing turned out to be such that the ground was already dark. But the rocket, climbing rapidly for 30 miles, arrived at a height where it could still be reached by the rays of the Sun, which had disappeared below the horizon as far as the ground observers were concerned. The rocket then looked so bright so suddenly, it was thought at first that a belated explosion had occurred.

Likewise, an observer in London might have caught sight of an incoming rocket that was still



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in sunlight, even though the observer was not. Between the time it disappeared from his view (having entered the shadow of the Earth) and the impact, there would then be some 20 to 30 seconds, a time interval of which the observer was either unaware in his excitement or which, if he was aware of it, he did not mention specifically in later retelling.

## THE "HIGHEST" MOUNTAIN

MOST of the letters I receive are, quite naturally, of the kind that *ask* something. It is a rare event when a letter *tells* me something. But soon after the appearance of the May issue, in which I touched briefly on the story of a supposedly very high mountain in eastern Asia, designated in the reports by the name of Amne Machin, I received a letter from a lady in South Carolina that can be labeled a contribution to geography. I print it just as my correspondent wrote it, merely abbreviating a few names for very obvious reasons:

"The story [about the mountain Amne Machin] was created out of thin air, solely to pull the leg of an unpopular newspaperman. And the imaginary mountain was never one mountain but two, and they were named for the most flat-chested girl known to the two pilots who started the story, on the theory that since real mountains are named for Jane Russell, who has real—er—attributes, then non-existing mountains ought to be named for a girl whose attributes were non-existent. The girl's name is Ann McN———.

"This newspaperman, whom I'll call Nameless, had attached himself to a certain Air Transport Command Group at Kurachi, India, during that period when 'flying the Hump' was drudging, soul-wracking misery. Whenever pilots would come in from a flight, even before they had had time to be thankful that they had made another trip and were still alive, there would be Nameless, his pencil at the ready, asking 'Did anything happen? Did anything happen?' Since a routine, uneventful trip was the best thing that *could* happen, the pilots became somewhat fed up with Nameless.

"The informant is my brother J. B., who was a captain in the Air Transport Command. He wrote twice weekly and all his letters have been kept and I have just spent several hours rereading them to be sure my memory was accurate. On one return leg of a Hump flight, my brother and his co-pilot, Lieutenant B.S., were blown off course and arrived several hours late at Kurachi. There had been some excitement over



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their tardiness and, of course, Nameless was there to get the details practically before they landed—with, I might add, half a teaspoonful of gas in their tanks. In reaction to some hours of danger, my brother and his co-pilot were in high spirits and it was then that the story was born.

"It quickly got out of hand, for Nameless believed every word, and other pilots added to and embellished it with subsequent trips. They grew to love that story and they were very disappointed when their C.O. made them stop. But, of course, even though they did stop, you can't smother a good story even if it isn't true . . ."

Well, if this is the inside story of the origin of that mountain—and it sounds mighty convincing to me—I can only hope that the majority of the people who remember the original story will also read this letter.

## ROCKET FUELS

ONE theme that crops up with fair regularity in my correspondence is rocket fuels. There seems to be a widespread impression around that further rocket research and especially the preliminaries to space travel are held up "because we have to wait until chemists find a more powerful fuel." I don't think anything is holding up research work at all—not counting some red tape which indubitably gets into the gears in places—but I can say without hesitation what *could* be holding it up. That would be plain lack of money.

Sometimes the suggestions made to overcome this imaginary obstacle are quite simple.

One correspondent remarked hopefully that rocket engineers may one day find out how to make dynamite safe enough to use it for a fuel. Well, nobody intends to load up a rocket, especially a manned one, with dynamite, but if it could be done, there would be a considerable *loss* of propulsion. The theoretical exhaust velocity would be 10,800 feet per second. From comparison of the theoretical values obtained by fuels in actual use, however, one can conclude that the actual exhaust velocity of a dynamite rocket would be more like 5000 feet per second. Alcohol and liquid oxygen produce an exhaust velocity of 7000 feet per second.

Others were not deceived by the violence of commercial explosives, but looked for a real criterion, the energy content of various substances which could be used as fuels. One correspondent stated that, as far as he could tell, the most powerful combination should be ozone and



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beryllium metal—which is correct. But then he wondered about the problem of how to feed a powder (the beryllium metal) into a rocket motor with some 300 lbs. per square inch of injection pressure and asked my advice on how this could be done. If there is a suitable method, I don't know it. Moreover, if I did know it, I might not trust it.

Another letter writer suggested liquid oxygen as the oxidizer and lithium or magnesium metal as the fuel, stating that the metals, "of course," would have to be fed into the rocket motor in the molten state. Well, the melting point of magnesium is around 1200 degrees Fahrenheit while that of lithium, though considerably lower, is still 370 degrees Fahrenheit. But the temperature of the liquid oxygen in the tank next to the hot tank for the molten metal is slightly below *minus* 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

The engineer would, at the very least, have a formidable insulating problems on his hands, not to mention his mind.

STILL another correspondent suggested that the following combinations be investigated and tried: ozone with molten picric acid; fluorine nitrate with molten yellow phosphorus; chlorine monofluoride with boron hydride; and, finally, liquid hydrogen peroxide with "liquid" carbon dioxide—he probably meant carbon monoxide and made a typing error.

Another correspondent merely wanted to know why rocket engineers consistently disdain hydrogen as a fuel, even though the high energy content of a mixture of hydrogen and oxygen must certainly be known to them.

The only way to answer all this is to explain the criteria for the selection of a fuel. Naturally the energy content of a fuel or fuel combination is, if not the most important, at least the one which attracts attention first. It can be expressed in two ways, the older one being to calculate its exhaust velocity.

I'll list a few *theoretical* exhaust velocities of fuels that have actually been used at one time or another, all of them assumed to be burned with pure liquid oxygen.

The value for 100-octane gasoline is 15,100 feet per second, for ethyl alcohol 14,400 feet per second, for aniline 14,700 feet per second, for vinyl ether 14,600 feet per second and for hydrazine hydrate 14,000 feet per second.

They all look pretty much alike, don't they? They look even more alike if you don't take these theoretical figures, but the figures you *actually* obtain, which are almost precisely half of the



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theoretical exhaust velocities.

The second and more recent method for evaluating this particular aspect of a rocket fuel is to work out its *specific impulse,* also called *specific thrust*. This is done by measuring the thrust of a given rocket motor and dividing the thrust by the fuel consumption per second.

The figures you obtain in this manner are all remarkably close to 200. Some fuels will come out as having a specific thrust of 190 while others will have a specific thrust of 210, but this is about as much deviation as you get. The only one that stands out is hydrogen, for its theoretical exhaust velocity would be around 18,500 feet per second and its specific impulse 280.

But the exhaust velocity, or the specific thrust, is only a comparatively small portion of the whole story. There are the so-called secondary considerations which, because of the close similarity of the specific thrust of most fuels, turn very rapidly into primary considerations. Hydrogen happens to be a fine example of a high-energy fuel that invalidates this advantage by a number of practical disadvantages.

LET'S begin with the specific gravity of the fuel. Remembering that the fuel consumption is not a question of volume but of mass, logically you can pack more mass into a given tank if the fuel has a high specific gravity. If your fuel is very "light," you need a larger tank; a larger tank will weigh more and the rocket will have a greater dead weight.

The specific gravity of liquid oxygen is 1.15 or a little higher than that of water. But since the specific gravity of liquid hydrogen is 0.07, you can immediately see how much larger the tanks would have to be. Furthermore, liquid oxygen is known to be very cold, but at the temperature of liquid oxygen, hydrogen is still in the merry gaseous state. To keep it liquid, its temperature has to be below *minus* 252.6 degrees centigrade or, translating into Fahrenheit, below minus 423 degrees. The hydrogen tank would need much better insulation than even the oxygen tank, which adds to the dead weight.

Another factor: no metal can stand up under the temperature of burning rocket fuels, hence the motor has to be cooled. This is done most efficiently by circulating the fuel (or the oxidizer) through the cooling jacket of the motor before it is injected. A liquefied gas is about the worst possible substance for this purpose. Though cold, it cannot absorb much heat. Because it is likely to be at or near its boiling



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point, it would turn into a gas, choke the flow and blow up the motor.

One of the criteria for a rocket fuel combination, therefore, is that at least one of the two liquids is suitable for cooling the motor. In the case of the customary combination of lightly watered ethyl alcohol and liquid oxygen, this is, of course, the alcohol. In the case of the other customary combination of nitric acid as the oxidizer and aniline as the fuel, either one can be used for this purpose.

More "secondary" considerations: benzene (benzol) has many of the earmarks of a good fuel, *but* it is not a liquid unless the temperature is above 5.4 degrees centigrade (42 degrees Fahrenheit) which means that on a cold day, or in the Arctic, you'd have to thaw your rocket out before you could fire it. You want a liquid that stays a liquid over the temperature range the weather bureau is likely to predict. Nor do you want a liquid that has the nasty habit of requiring pressure to stay liquid. Consequently, a pressure tank is bound to be a heavy tank.

You naturally want storability. Ideally, a good fuel can be put away in drums and be used three, six or twelve years later. If at all possible, you want your fuel to be neither corrosive nor toxic, but in practice this demand has been relinquished to the extent that corrosive and toxic substances are accepted if the crew can be protected by special clothing. The hope is, of course, that one day a non-toxic or non-corrosive substitute will come out of the laboratory.

Finally, there is the problem of availability. The fuels must not be based on raw materials that are rare or especially difficult to process. The raw materials, in short, should be abundant and cheap. Here you can draw an even finer line. Alcohol as well as gasoline are both in good supply. But in the case of an emergency, everybody — Army, Navy, Air Force, the Marines, the Coast Guard and most of industry—will scream for alcohol and gasoline.

To my mind, a fine rocket fuel also has the characteristic that it will be completely useless for any other type of engine. Hydrazine, not much used right now, but strongly advocated by many, is such a fuel.

—WILLY LEY



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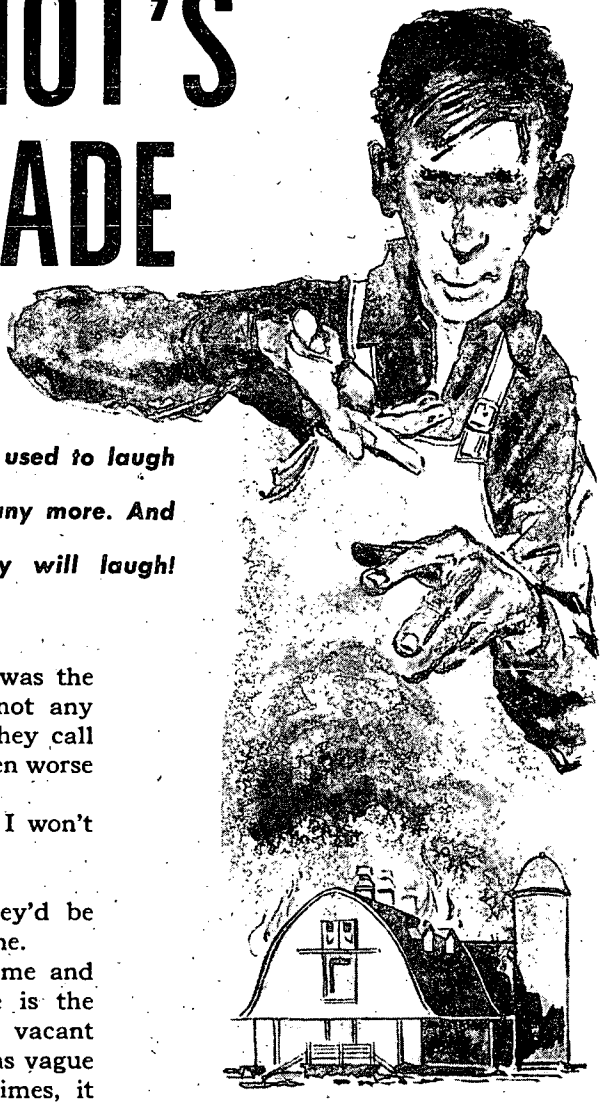
# IDIOT'S CRUSADE

By CLIFFORD D. SIMAK



*People in my town used to laugh at me. They don't any more. And pretty soon—nobody will laugh!*

FOR a long time I was the village idiot, but not any longer—although they call me "dummy" still and even worse than that.

I'm a genius now, but I won't let them know.

Not ever.

If they found out, they'd be on their guard against me.

No one has suspected me and no one will. My shuffle is the same and my gaze as vacant and my mumblings just as vague as they ever were. At times, it has been hard to remember to keep the shuffle and the gaze and

Illustrated by ERNIE BARTH



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mumblings as they were before, times when it was hard not to overdo them. But it's important not to arouse suspicion.

It all started the morning I went fishing.

I told Ma I was going fishing while we were eating breakfast and she didn't object. She knows I like fishing. When I fish, I don't get into trouble.

"All right, Jim," she said. "Some fish will taste real good."

"I know where to get them," I told her. "That hole in the creek just past Alf Adams' place."

"Now don't you get into any fracas with Alf," Ma warned me. "Just because you don't like him—"

"He was mean to me. He worked me harder than he should have. And he cheated me out of my pay. And he laughs at me."

I shouldn't have said that, because it hurts Ma when I say someone laughs at me.

"You mustn't pay attention to what people do," said Ma, speaking kind and gentle. "Remember what Preacher Martin said last Sunday. He said—"

"I know what he said, but I still don't like being laughed at. People shouldn't laugh at me."

"No," Ma agreed, looking sad. "They shouldn't."

I went on eating my breakfast, thinking that Preacher Martin was a great one to be talking about humility and patience, knowing the kind of man he was and how he was carrying on with Jennie Smith, the organist. He was a great one to talk about anything at all.

AFTER breakfast, I went out to the woodshed to get my fishing tackle and Bounce came across the street to help me. After Ma, Bounce is the best friend I have. He can't talk to me, of course—not actually, that is—but neither does he laugh at me.

I talked to him while I was digging worms and asked him if he wanted to go fishing with me. I could see he did, so I went across the street to tell Mrs. Lawson that Bounce was going along. He belonged to her, but he spent most of his time with me.

We started out, me carrying my cane pole and all my fishing stuff and Bounce walking at my heels, as if I were someone he was proud to be seen walking with.

We went past the bank, where Banker Patton was sitting in the big front window, working at his desk and looking like the most important man in all of Mapleton, which he was. I went by slow so I could hate him good.

Ma and me wouldn't be living in the old tumbledown house we're living in if Banker Patton



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hadn't foreclosed on our home after Pa died.

We went out past Alf Adams' place, which is the first farm out of town, and I hated him some, too, but not as hard as Banker Patton. All Alf had done was work me harder than he should have, then cheat me of my pay.

Alf was a big, blustery man and a good enough farmer, I guess —at least he made it pay. He had a big new barn and it's just like him not to paint it red, the way any proper barn is painted, but white with red trim. Who ever heard of paint trim on a barn?

Just beyond Alf's place, Bounce and I turned off the road and went down across the pasture, heading for the big hole in the creek.

Alf's prize Hereford bull was way off in another corner of the pasture with the rest of the stock. When he saw us, he started coming for us, not mean or belligerent, but just investigating and ready for a fight if one was offered him. I wasn't afraid of him, because I'd made friends with him that summer I had worked for Alf. I used to pet him and scratch behind his ears. Alf said I was a crazy fool and someday the bull would kill me.

"You can never trust a bull," Alf said.

When the bull was near enough to see who it was, he knew we meant no harm, so he went back across the pasture again.

We got to the hole and I started fishing, while Bounce went up the stream to do some investigating. I caught a few fish, but they weren't very big and they weren't biting very often and I got disinterested. I like to fish, but to keep my interest up, I have to catch some.

So I got to daydreaming. I began wondering if you marked off a certain area of ground—a hundred feet square, say—and went over it real careful, how many different kinds of plants you'd find. I looked over a patch of ground next to where I was sitting and I could see just ordinary pasture grass and some dandelions and some dock and a couple of violets, and a buttercup which didn't have any flowers as yet.

Suddenly, when I was looking at the dandelion, I realized I could see *all* that dandelion, not just the part that showed above the ground!

I DON'T know how long I'd been seeing it that way before realizing it. And I'm not certain that "seeing" is the right word. Maybe "know" would be better. I *knew* how that dandelion's big taproot went down into the ground and how the little feathery roots grew out of it, and I



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knew where all the roots were, how they were taking water and chemicals out of the ground, how reserve food was stored in the root and how the dandelion used the sunlight to convert its food into a form it could use. And the funniest thing about it was that I had never known any of it before.

I looked at the other plants and I could see all of them the same way. I wondered if something had gone wrong with my eyes and if I would have to go around looking into things instead of at them, so I tried to make the new seeing go away and it did.

Then I tried to see the dandelion root again and I saw it, just the way I had before.

I sat there, wondering why I had never been able to see that way before and why I was able to now. And while I was wondering, I looked into the pool and tried to see down into the pool and I could, just as plain as day. I could see clear to the bottom of it and into all the corners of it, and there were lunkers lying in there, bigger than any fish that ever had been taken from the creek.

I saw that my bait was nowhere near any of the fish, so I moved it over until it was just in front of the nose of one of the biggest ones. But the fish didn't seem to see it, or if he did, he wasn't hungry, for he just lay there, fanning the water with his fins and making his gills work.

I moved the bait down until it bumped his nose, but he still didn't pay any attention to it.

So I made the fish hungry.

Don't ask me how I did it. I can't tell you. I all at once knew I could and just how to do it. So I made him hungry and he went for that bait like Bounce grabbing a bone.

He pulled the cork clear under and I heaved on the pole and hoisted him out. I took him off the hook and put him on the stringer, along with the four or five little ones I'd caught.

Then I picked out another big fish and lowered my bait down to him and made him hungry.

In the next hour and a half, I just about cleaned out all the big fish. There were some little ones left, but I didn't bother with them. I had the stringer almost full and I couldn't carry it in my hand, for then the fish would have dragged along the ground. I had to sling it over my shoulder and those fish felt awfully wet.

I called Bounce and we went back to town.

EVERYONE I met stopped and had a look at my fish and wanted to know where I'd got them and what I'd caught them



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on and if there were any left or had I taken them all. When I told them I'd taken all there was, they laughed fit to kill.

I was just turning off Main Street on my way home when Banker Patton stepped out of the barber shop. He smelled nice from the bottles of stuff that Jake, the barber, uses on his customers.

He saw me with my fish and stopped in front of me. He looked at me and looked at the fish and he rubbed his fat hands together. Then he said, like he was talking to a child, "Why, Jimmy, where did you get all those fish?" He sounded a little bit, too, like I might not have a right to them and probably had used some low-down trick to get them.

"Out in the hole on Alf's place," I told him.

All at once, without even trying to do it, I saw him the same way I had seen the dandelion—his stomach and intestines and something that must have been his liver—and up above them all, surrounded by a doughy mass of pink, a pulsating thing that I knew must be his heart.

I guess that's the first time anybody ever *really* hated someone else's guts.

I shot out my hands—well, not my hands, for one was clutching the cane pole and the other was busy with the fish—but it felt almost exactly as if I'd put them out and grabbed his heart and squeezed it hard.

He gasped once, then sighed and wilted, like all the starch had gone out of him, and I had to jump out of the way so he wouldn't bump into me when he fell.

He never moved after he hit the ground.

Jake came running out of his barber shop.

"What happened to him?" he asked me.

"He just fell over," I said.

Jake looked at him. "It's a heart attack. I'd know it anywhere. I'll run for Doc."

He took off up the street for Doc Mason, while other people came hurrying out of the places along the street.

There was Ben from the cheese factory and Mike from the pool hall and a couple of farmers who were in the general store.

I got out of there and went on home and Ma was pleased with the fish.

"They'll taste real good," she said, looking at them. "How did you come to catch that many, Jim?"

"They were biting good," I said.

"Well, you hurry up and clean them. We'll have to eat some right away and I'll take some over to Preacher Martin's and



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I'll rub salt in the others and put them in the cellar where it's good and cool. They'll keep for several days."

JUST then, Mrs. Lawson ran across the street and told Ma about Banker Patton.

"He was talking to Jim when it happened," she told Ma.

Ma said to me, "Why didn't you tell me, Jim?"

"I never got around to it," I said. "I was showing you these fish."

So the two of them went on talking about Banker Patton and I went out to the woodshed and cleaned the fish. Bounce sat alongside me and watched me do it and I swear he was as happy over those fish as I was, just like he might have had a hand in catching them.

Now I don't want you to think I'm trying to make you believe Bounce actually talked, because he didn't. But it was just as if he'd said those very words.

"It was a nice day, Bounce," I said and Bounce said he'd thought so, too. He recalled running up and down the stream and how he'd chased a frog and the good smell there was when he stuck his nose down to the ground and sniffed.

People all the time are laughing at me and making cracks about me and trying to bait me because I'm the village idiot, but there are times when the village idiot has it over all of them. They would have been scared they were going crazy if a dog talked to them, but I didn't think it was strange at all. I just thought how much nicer it was now that Bounce could talk and how I wouldn't have to guess at what he wanted to say. I never thought it was queer at all, because I always figured Bounce could talk if he only tried, being a smart dog.

So Bounce and I sat there and talked while I cleaned the fish. When I came out of the woodshed, Mrs. Lawson had gone home and Ma was in the kitchen, getting a skillet ready to cook some of the fish.

"Jim, you . . ." she hesitated, then went on, "Jim, you didn't have anything to do with what happened to Banker Patton, did you? You didn't push him or hit him or anything?"

"I never even touched him," I said and that was true. I certainly hadn't touched him.

In the afternoon, I went out and worked in the garden. Ma does some housework now and then and that brings in some money, but we couldn't get along if it wasn't for the garden. I used to work some, but since the fight I had with Alf over him not paying me, she don't let me work



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for anyone. She says if I take care of the garden and catch some fish, I'm helping out enough.

WORKING in the garden, I found a different use for my new way of seeing. There were worms in the cabbages and I could see every one of them and I killed them all by squeezing them, the way I'd squeezed Banker Patton. I found a cloudy sort of stuff on some of the tomato plants and I suppose it was some kind of virus, because it was so small I could hardly see it at first. So I magnified it and could see it fine, and I made it go away. I didn't squeeze it like I did the worms. I just made it go away.

It was fun working in the garden, when you could look down into the ground and see how the parsnips and radishes were coming and could kill the cutworms you found there, and know just how the soil was and if everything was all right.

We'd had fish for lunch and we had fish again for supper, and after supper, I went for a walk.

Before I knew it, I was walking by Banker Patton's place and, going past, I felt the grief inside the house.

I stood out on the sidewalk and let the grief come into me. I suppose that outside any house in town, I could have felt just as easily whatever was going on inside, but I hadn't known I could and I hadn't tried. It was only because the grief in the Patton house was so deep and strong that I noticed it.

The banker's oldest daughter was upstairs in her room and I could feel her crying. The other daughter was sitting with her mother in the living room and neither of them was crying, but they seemed lost and lonely. There were other people in the house, but they weren't very sad. Some neighbors, probably, who'd come in to keep the family company.

I felt sorry for the three of them and I wanted to help them. Not that I'd done anything wrong in killing Banker Patton, but I felt sorry for those women, because, after all, it wasn't their fault the way Banker Patton was, so I stood there, wishing I could help them.

And all at once I felt that perhaps I could and I tried first with the daughter who was upstairs in her room. I reached out to her and I told her happy thoughts. It wasn't easy to start with, but pretty soon I got the hang of it and it wasn't hard to make her happy. Then I made the other two happy and went on my way, feeling better about



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what I'd done to the family.

I listened in on the houses I passed. Most of them were happy, or at least contented, though I found a couple that were sad. Automatically, I reached out my mind and gave them happiness. It wasn't that I felt I should do something good for any particular person. To tell the truth, I don't remember which houses I made happy. I just thought if I was able to do a thing like that, I should do it. It wasn't right for someone to have that kind of power and refuse to use it.

MA was sitting up for me when I got home. She was looking kind of worried, the way she always does when I disappear for a long time and she don't know where I am.

I went up to my room and got into bed and lay awake for a long time, wondering how come I could do all the things I could and how, suddenly, today I was able to do them when I'd never been able to before. But finally I went to sleep.

*The situation is not ideal, of course, but a good deal better than I had any reason to expect. It is not likely that one should find on every alien planet a host so made to order for our purpose as is this one of mine.*

*It has accepted me without recognizing me, has made no attempt to deny itself to me or to reject me. It is of an order of intelligence which has enabled it, quickly and efficiently, to make use of those most-readily manipulated of my abilities and this has aided me greatly in my observations. It is fairly mobile and consorts freely with its kind, which are other distinct advantages.*

*I reckon myself fortunate, indeed, to have found so satisfactory a host so soon upon arrival.*

When I got up and had breakfast, I went outside and found Bounce waiting for me. He said he wanted to go and chase some rabbits and I agreed to go along. He said since we could talk now, we ought to make a good team. I could stand up on a stump or a pile of rocks or even climb a tree, so I could overlook the ground and see the rabbit and yell out to him which way it was going, and he could intercept it.

We went up the road toward Alf's place, but turned off down across the pasture, heading for some cutover land on the hill across the creek.

When we were off the road, I turned around to give Alf a good hating and while I was standing there, hating him, a thought came into my mind. I didn't know if I could do it, but it seemed to be



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a good idea, so I tried.

I moved my seeing up to Alf's barn and went right through and came out in the middle of the haymow, with hay packed all around me. But all the time, you understand, I was standing out there in the pasture with Bounce, on our way to chase some rabbits.

I'd like to explain what I did next and how I did it, but mostly what worries me is how I knew enough to do it—I mean enough about chemical reaction and stuff like that. I did something to the hay and something to the oxygen and I started a fire up there in the center of the haymow. When I saw it was started good, I got out of there and was in myself again and Bounce and I went on across the creek and up the hill.

I kept looking back over my shoulder, wondering if the fire might not have gone out, but all at once there was a little trickle of smoke coming out of the haymow opening up under the gable's end.

We'd got up into the cutover land by that time and I sat down on a stump and enjoyed myself. The fire had a good start before it busted out and there wasn't a thing that could be done to save the barn. It went up with a roar and made the prettiest column of smoke you've ever seen.

ON the way home, I stopped at the general store. Alf was there and he seemed much too happy to have just lost his barn.

But it wasn't long until I understood why he was so happy.

"I had her insured," he told Bert Jones, the storekeeper, "plumb up to the hilt. Anyhow, it was too big a barn, a lot bigger than I needed. When I built it, I figured I was going to go into milking heavier than I've done and would need the space."

Bert chuckled. "Handy fire for you, Alf."

"Best thing that ever happened to me. I can build another barn and have some cash left over."

I was pretty sore about bungling it, but I thought of a way to get even.

After lunch, I went up the road again and out into Alf's pasture and hunted up the bull. He was glad to see me, although he did a little pawing and some bellowing just to show off.

I had wondered all the way out if I could talk to the bull the way I talked to Bounce and I was afraid that maybe I couldn't, for Bounce was bound to be smarter than a bull.

I was right, of course. It was awful hard to make that bull understand anything.

I made the mistake of scratching behind his ears while I tried



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to talk to him and he almost went to sleep. I could feel just how good the scratching felt to him. So I hauled off and kicked him in the ribs to wake him up, so he would pay attention. He did pay a little closer attention and even did a little answering, but not much. A bull is awful dumb.

But I felt fairly sure I'd got my idea across, for he started acting sore and feisty and I'm afraid that I overdid it just a mite. I made it to the fence ahead of him and went over without even touching it. The bull stopped at the fence and stood there, pawing and raising Cain, and I got out of there as fast as I could go.

I went home fairly pleased with myself for thinking up as smart a thing as that. I wasn't surprised in the least to hear that evening that Alf had been killed by his bull.

It wasn't a pretty way to die, of course, but Alf had it coming to him, the way he beat me out of my summer wages.

I was sitting in the pool hall when the news was brought in by someone and they all talked about it. Some said Alf had always claimed you couldn't trust no bull, and someone else said he'd often said I was the only one who'd ever gotten along with this particular bull and he was scared all the time I was there for fear the bull would kill me.

They saw me sitting there and they asked me about it and I acted dumb and all of them laughed at me, but I didn't mind their laughing. I knew something they didn't know. Imagine how surprised they'd be if they ever learned the truth!

They won't, of course.

I'm too smart for that.

WHEN I went home, I got a tablet and a pencil and started to write down the names of all my enemies—everyone who had ever laughed at me or done mean things to me or said mean things about me.

The list was pretty long. It included almost everyone in town.

I sat there thinking and I decided maybe I shouldn't kill everyone in town. Not that I couldn't, for I could have, just as slick as anything. But thinking about Alf and Banker Patton, I could see there wasn't any lasting satisfaction in killing people you hate. And I could see as plain as day that if you killed a lot of people, it could leave you pretty lonesome.

I read down through the list of names I'd made and I gave a couple of them the benefit of a doubt and scratched them out. I read those that were left over and I had to admit that every one



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of them was bad. I decided that if I didn't kill them, I'd have to do something else about them, for I couldn't let them go on being bad.

I thought about it a long time and I remembered some of the things I'd heard Preacher Martin say, although, as I've mentioned before, he's a great one to be saying them. I decided I'd have to lay aside my hate and return good for evil.

*I am puzzled and disturbed, although that, perhaps, is the normal reaction when one attaches oneself to an alien being. This is a treacherous and unprincipled species and, as such, an incalculably important one to study.*

*I am continually amazed at the facility with which my host has acquired the use of my talents, continually appalled by the use he makes of them. I am more than puzzled by his own conviction that he is less intelligent than his fellows; his actions during my acquaintance with him do not bear this out. I wonder if it may not be a racial trait, a sort of cult-attitude of inferiority, that it may be ill-mannered to think of oneself in any other way.*

*But I half suspect that he may have sensed me in some way without my knowing it and may be employing this strange conceptas a device to force me from his mind. Under such a circumstance, it would not be prime ethics for me to remain with him —but he has proved to be such an excellent seat of observation that I am loath to leave him.*

*The fact is, I don't know. I could, of course, seize control of his mind and thus learn the truth of this and other matters which are perplexing me. But I fear that, in doing so, I would destroy his effectiveness as a free agent and thus impair his observational value. I have decided to wait before taking such drastic measure.*

I ATE breakfast in a hurry, being anxious to get started. Ma asked me what I was going to do and I said just walk around a bit.

First off, I went to the parsonage and sat down outside the hedge between it and the church. Pretty soon, Preacher Martin came out and began to walk up and down in what he called his garden, pretending he was sunk in holy thought, although I always suspected it was just an act to impress old ladies who might see him.

I put out my mind real easy and finally I got it locked with his so neatly, it seem that it was me, not him, who was walking up and down. It was a queer



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feeling, I can tell you, for all the time I knew good and well that I was sitting there back of the hedge.

He wasn't thinking any holy thoughts at all. He was going over in his mind all the arguments he intended to use to hit up the church board for a raise in salary. He was doing some minor cussing out of some of the members of the board for being tight-fisted skinflints and that I agreed with, because they surely were.

Taking it easy, just sort of stealing in on his thoughts, I made him think about Jennie Smith, the organist, and the way he was carrying on with her, and I made him ashamed of himself for doing it.

He tried to push me away, though he didn't know it was me; he just thought it was his own mind bringing up the matter. But I wouldn't let him push the thought away. I piled it on real heavy.

I made him think how the people in the church trusted him and looked to him for spiritual leadership, and I made him remember back to when he was a younger man, just out of seminary, and looked on his lifetime work as a great crusade. I made him think of how he'd betrayed all the things he'd believed in then, and I got him down so low, he was almost bawling. Then I made him tell himself that owning up was the only way he could absolve himself. Once he'd done that, he could start life over again and be a credit to himself and his church.

I went away, figuring I'd done a fair job of work on him, but knowing that I'd have to check up on him every now and then.

At the general store, I sat around and watched Bert Jones sweep out the place. While he was talking to me, I sneaked into his mind and recalled to him all the times he'd paid way less than market prices for the eggs the farmers brought in, and the habit of sneaking in extra items on the bills he sent out to his charge customers, and how he'd cheated on his income tax. I scared him plenty on the income tax and I kept working at him until he'd about decided to make it right with everyone he'd cheated.

I didn't finish the job airtight, but I knew I could come back any time I wanted to and in a little while, I'd make an honest man of Bert.

OVER at the barber shop, I watched Jake cut a head of hair. I wasn't too interested in the man Jake was working on—he lived four or five miles out of town—and at the moment, I figured that I'd better confine my work to the people in the village.



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Before I left, I had Jake plenty worried about the gambling he'd been doing in the back room at the pool hall and had him almost ready to make a clean breast of it to his wife.

I went over to the pool hall. Mike was sitting back of the counter with his hat on, reading the baseball scores in the morning paper. I got a day-old paper and pretended to read it. Mike laughed and asked me when I'd learned to read, so I laid it on good and thick.

When I left, I knew, just as soon as I was out the door, he'd go down into the basement and dump all the moonshine down the drain, and before too long, I'd get him to close up the back room.

Over at the cheese factory, I didn't have much chance to work on Ben. The farmers were bringing in their milk and he was too busy for me to really get into his mind. But I did manage to make him think of what would happen if Jake ever caught him with Jake's wife. And I knew when I could catch him alone, I could do a top-notch job on him, for I saw he scared easy.

And that's the way it went.

It was tough work and at times I felt it was just too much of a job. But then I'd sit down and remind myself that it was my duty to keep on—that for some reason this power had been given me and that it was up to me to use it for all it was worth. And furthermore, I was not to use it for myself, for any selfish ends, but for the good of other people.

I don't think I missed a person in the village.

*Remember how we wondered if there might not be unseen flaws in this plan of ours? We went over it most carefully and could find none, yet all of us feared that some might show up in actual practice. Now I can report there is one. It is this:*

*Accurate, impersonal observation is impossible, for as soon as one introduces one's self into a host, his abilities become available to the host and at once become a factor which upsets the norm.*

*As a result of this, I am getting a distorted picture of the culture of this planet. Reluctant to intervene before, I am now convinced that I must move to take command of the situation.*

BERT, now that he's turned honest, is the happiest man you ever saw. Even losing all the customers who got sore at him when he explained why he paid them back some money doesn't bother him. I don't know how Ben is getting along—he disappeared right after Jake took the



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shotgun to him. But, then, everyone agrees Ben was overdoing it when he went to Jake and told him he was sorry for what had been going on. Jake's wife is gone, too, and some folks say she followed Ben.

To tell the truth, I am well satisfied with the way everything's turned out. Everyone is honest and no one is fooling around with anyone else and there ain't a lick of gambling or drinking going on in town. Mapleton probably is the most moral village in the United States.

I feel that perhaps it turned out the way it did because I started out by conquering my own evil thoughts and, instead of killing all the folks I hated, set out to do them good.

I'm a little puzzled when I walk through the streets at night because I don't pick up near as many happy thoughts as I used to. In fact, there are times when it keeps me busy almost all night long, getting them cheered up. You'd think honest folks would be happy folks. I imagine it's because, now they're good instead of bad, they're not so given to giddy pleasures, but are more concerned with the solid, worthwhile side of life.

I'm a little worried about myself. While I did a lot of good, I may have done it for a selfish reason. I did it, perhaps partly,


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to make up for killing Alf and Banker Patton. And I did it not for just people, but for people I know. That doesn't seem right. Why should only people I know benefit?

*Help! Can you hear me? I'm trapped! I can neither control my host nor can I escape from him. Do not under any circumstances let anyone else try to use another member of this race as a host!*

*Help!*

*Can you hear me?*

*Help!*

I've sat up all night, thinking, and now the way is clear.

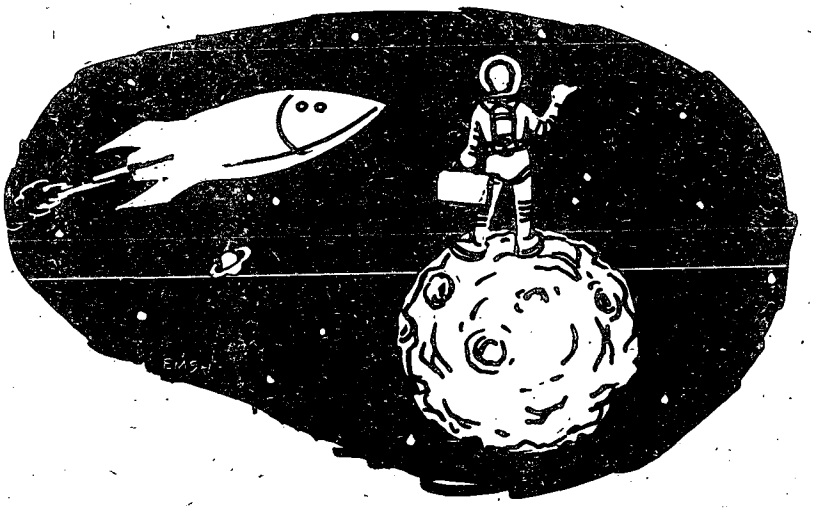
Having reached my decision, I feel important and humble, both at once. I know I'm a chosen instrument for good and must not let anything stop me. I know the village was no more than a proving ground, a place for me to learn what I could really do. Knowing now, I'm determined to use the power to its utmost for the good of all humanity.

Ma's been saving up a little money for a long time for a decent burial.

I know just where she hides it. It's all she's got.

But it's enough to get me to the U. N.

—CLIFFORD D. SIMAK





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# $1,000 a plate

***When Marsy Gras shot off its skyrockets,***

***Mars Observatory gave it the works—***

***fireworks!***

By JACK McKENTY

Illustrated by BECK

SUNSET on Mars is a pale, washed out, watery sort of procedure that is hardly worth looking at. The shadows of the cactus lengthen, the sun goes down without the slightest hint of color or display and everything is dark. About once a year there is one cloud that turns pink briefly. But even the travel books devote more space describing the new sign adorning the Canal Casino than they do on the sunset.

The night sky is something else again. Each new crop of tourists goes to bed at sunrise the day after arrival with stiff necks from looking up all night. The craters of the moons are visible to the naked eye, and even a cheap pair of opera glasses can pick out the buildings of the Deimos Space Station.

A typical comment from a



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sightseer is, "Just think, Fred, we were way up there only twelve hours ago."

At fairly frequent intervals, the moons eclipse. The local Chamber of Commerce joins with the gambling casinos to use these occasions as excuses for a celebration. The "Marsy Gras" includes floats, costumes, liquor, women, gambling — and finishes off with a display of fireworks and a stiff note of protest from the nearby Mars Observatory.

THE day after a particularly noisy, glaring fireworks display, the top brass at the Observatory called an emergency meeting. The topic was not a new one, but fresh evidence, in the form of several still-wet photographic plates, showing out-of-focus skyrocket trails and a galaxy of first-magnitude aerial cracker explosions was presented.

"I maintain they fire them in our direction on purpose," one scientist declared.

This was considered to be correct because the other directions around town were oil refineries and the homes of the casino owners.

"Why don't we just move the Observatory way out in the desert?" a technician demanded. "It wouldn't be much of a job."

"It would be a tremendous job," said Dr. Morton, the physicist. "If not for the glare of city lights on Earth, we wouldn't have had to move our telescopes to the Moon. If not for the gravel falling out of the sky on the Moon, making it necessary to resurface the reflectors every week, we wouldn't have had to move to Mars. Viewing conditions here are just about perfect—except for the immense cost of transporting the equipment, building materials, workmen, and paying us triple time for working so far from home. Why, did you ever figure the cost of a single photographic plate? What with salaries, freight to and from Earth, maintenance and all the rest, it's enormous!"

"Then why don't we cut down the cost of ruined exposures," asked the technician, "by moving the Observatory away from town?"

"Because," Dr. Morton explained, "we'd have to bring in crews to tear the place down, other crews to move it, still more crews to rebuild it. Not to mention unavoidable breakage and replacement, which involve more freight from Earth. At $7.97 per pound dead-weight . . . well, you figure it out."

"So we can't move and we can't afford ruined thousand-dollar plates," said the scientist who had considered himself a target for the fireworks. "Then what's the answer?"



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The usual suggestion was proposed that a delegation approach the Town Council to follow up the letter of protest. A search through the past meetings' minutes showed that this had never accomplished anything up to date.

A recent arrival to the Observatory mentioned that their combined brain power should be enough to beat the games and thus force the casino owners—who were the real offenders—out of business. One of the scientists, who had already tried that very scheme on a small scale, reported his results. He proved with his tabulations that, in this instance, science, in the guise of the law of averages, was unfortunately against them.

Dr. Morton rose to his feet. The other men listened to his plan, at first with shocked horror, then with deep interest and finally in wild exultation. The meeting broke up with most of the members grinning from ear to ear. "It's lucky Dr. Morton is a physicist," said one of the directors. "No astronomer would ever have thought of that."

A FEW days later a modest little ad appeared in the weekly publication "What to do in Marsport." It did not try to compete with any of the casino ads (all of which featured pretty girls), but it had a unique heading.

**FREE**
**For the First Time Ever**
**Your HOROSCOPE**
**SCIENTIFICALLY CAST**
**by the Staff of the**
**FAMOUS MARS OBSERVATORY**
**Learn your Luck, your Future!**
**Write or call Mars Observatory.**
**No charge. No obligation.**

Since the horoscopes being offered were about the only things on Mars that didn't cost the tourists any money, the response was great. The recipient of a horoscope found a mimeographed folder which contained three pages describing the present positions of the planets, where to look for Earth in the sky, and what science hoped to learn the next time Mercury was in transit. The fourth page held the kicker. It said that while the tourist's luck would be better than average at most of the gambling houses, he would lose consistently if he played at Harvey's Club.

Within two days the only people playing at Harvey's were the shills. The following day, the visitors to the observatory included Harvey.

The gambler was welcomed with mingled respect for his money and contempt for his occupation. He was taken immediately to see Dr. Morton, who greeted him with a sly smile.



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Harvey's conversation was brief and to the point. "How much?" he asked waving a horoscope under Dr. Morton's nose.

"Just a promise," said the scientist. Harvey said nothing but looked sullen. "You are on the Town Council," Morton continued. "Now, the next time the question of tourist entertainment is discussed, we want you to vote *against* a fireworks display." He then explained how important plates had been ruined by skyrocket trails.

Harvey listened with great interest, especially when Dr. Morton flatly stated that each casino, in turn, would get the same publicity in the horoscopes.

"The Council members are all for the tourists," Harvey commented, "and you guys are supposed to be nuts, like all scientists. But I'll do like you say." He reached into his pocket. "Here's fifty bucks. Use it for a full page ad this time and do the Desert Sands Casino in your next horoscope. And say—before I go, can I look through the telescope? I never seemed to have the time before."

AT weekly intervals, Dr. Morton "did" the Desert Sands; Frankland's Paradise; the Martian Gardens; and the Two Moons Club. From each owner he extracted the same promise—to vote against the fireworks at the Council meetings.

The technique was settling down to a routine. Each victim came, made the promise, paid for the following week's ad, named the next casino, and was taken on a tour of the Observatory. Then disaster struck.

It took the form of an interplanetary telegram from Harvard Observatory, their parent organization. It read:

EARTH NEWSPAPERS CARRYING ACCOUNTS OF HOROSCOPES PUBLISHED BY YOUR ORGANIZATION VERY UNSCIENTIFIC MUST STOP AT ONCE FIND OTHER SOLUTION

L K BELL DIRECTOR

Dr. Morton was eating alone in the staff dining room when he noticed a familiar face beside him. "Harvey," he said. "Guess you've come down to gloat over our misfortune."

"No, Professor," said Harvey. "You've got my promise to help you boys and I'll stick by you. It's a rotten shame, too. You just about made it. The rest of the club owners saw the writing on the wall and were going to cooperate with you when the telegram came. All of us got contacts in the telegraph office, so they heard about it soon as it arrived and stayed away."

Dr. Morton said, "Yes, I sup-



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posed they would. There's not much we can do now."

"There are thirteen members on the Council." Harvey continued, "and you've got five of us. If that telegram had only come one day later—no more fireworks. But I got an idea."

Dr. Morton pushed aside his empty coffee cup and stood up. "Let's get out in the fresh air."

The Town Council was adding insult to injury by staging one of the biggest fireworks displays ever. It consisted of practically all skyrockets. Dr. Morton expressed wonder at their supply; Harvey explained that they were made right on Mars. He went on to tell his idea.

"I was real interested in everything when you took me around the first time I was here," the gambler said. "The same goes for the other boys who saw the place. Most of us meant to come out here and look around sometime, but you people work nights and, us mostly working nights, too, we never got around to it. How about arranging an exclusive tour sometime just for the club operators and their help? Then when they see everything, you could offer to name a star after them or something. If I hadn't already promised, I'd be willing to promise, just to be able to point in the sky and say 'That's Harvey's Star.'"

Dr. Morton smiled gently. "That's a wonderful idea," he said, "but I don't think it would work. Any stars worth looking at with the naked eye already have names. The only ones we could name after people are so far away that, it would take an exposure of several hours, just to see them on a photographic plate. You wouldn't be able to point yours out at all. Besides, Harvard Observatory wouldn't stand for this idea either. It would make as much sense to them as you naming a poker chip after me."

He sighed. "But, in any case, we would like to have all the owners over some time. It might improve relations somewhat." The two of them watched a rocket wobble all over the sky before exploding.

"Let's go back inside," said the physicist. "Maybe we can arrange that tour for Sunday."

SUNDAY afternoon the visitors, presumably softened up by what one of the chemists thought were martinis, were seated in the lecture hall listening to Dr. Morton's concluding remarks.

"One of the technicians is working on a gadget with a photocell that closes the shutter on the film when a rocket goes up," Dr. Morton was saying. "It



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should cut down the exposure time a great deal. Right now, every night may be significant. If the plates from any one night are spoiled, we may not be able to duplicate them for a Martian year. Mankind is preparing the first trip to another star, and the work of Mars Observatory is necessary to insure the success of that trip. You gentlemen are rightly the leaders of Mars, and so it is up to you to decide whether or not that success will be possible." He sat down to a smattering of applause.

The visitors, except Harvey, then left.

"It didn't go over, Professor," said Harvey.

I know," said Dr. Morton. "That washes out that plan." He turned to the gambler. "You're the only person I can trust with this," he said. "How would you like to help me make some fireworks?"

ONE week later the two men had everything ready. That night, as quietly as possible, they moved to a position behind a fence near the skyrocket launching racks. Dr. Morton was carrying a compass, a flashlight, and a small clinometer; Harvey was struggling with two large skyrockets. He whispered, "What if we miss or they go off too soon, or something?"

"Nonsense, Harvey," said Dr. Morton. He busied himself with the flashlight and compass, and carefully aimed one of the rockets. "You forget I am a physicist." He then aimed the other rocket and checked elevation with the clinometer. "The fuels are standard, and I worked out the trajectories on the computor. Ready with your match? These are going to explode in the canal, and get everybody in the Canal Casino all wet." He peeked over the fence, to see how the regular display was doing. "Here comes their finale. Ready, set, light!"

Covered by the launching of the last of the official display, their two rockets arced up and away. One of them did explode in the canal, and most of the Casino's patrons did get wet. But the other wobbled off to the right, landed on the roof of Harvey's bachelor home and burned it to the ground.

DR. Morton sat numbly in front of his typewriter, staring at a letter. He couldn't seem to find the right words for what he wished to say. He tried to derive inspiration from a glossy photograph lying on the table beside him. It had what looked like another skyrocket trail on it.

Before he could answer it, the



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door opened and Harvey walked in, accompanied by two men with muscles. "I haven't seen you since the accident, Professor," he said.

"I've been trying to write you a letter," said Dr. Morton, "to tell you how sorry I am about what happened. And I also have to thank you for getting that law against fireworks through the Council. I am extremely sorry it took your house burning down to convince them."

"I keep my promises," said Harvey. One of the men with muscles turned the radio on, loud.

"We're trying to get up a collection among the staff to help pay for your losses," said Dr. Morton, "but the director suggested a more permanent kind of remembrance." He picked up the photograph. "This will be one of the brightest objects in the sky, in a few months. It won't be back again for thousands of years, but it will be around for a good while. We've just discovered it, and it is our privilege to call it 'Harvey's Comet.' "

"That's nice," said Harvey. The first of the two men went around pulling down blinds; the other went into the bathroom and starting filling the tub.

"Well," said the physicist, looking tired and old, "I guess there's nothing more I can say."

"Oh, yes, there is, Professor," said Harvey, with a sudden grin on his face. He turned to his muscle men. "You two guys cut out the comedy and bring it in, now."

The two men followed his instructions.

"You see, Professor," the gambler continued, "I took a beating on the house, but the other club boys chipped in and made up all my losses. So, I don't need your money at all. Besides, I have two things to thank *you* for. First, I heard about the comet from one of your men, and it's the nicest thing anybody's ever done for me." One of his men came back with what looked like a round candy box. "Second, that fire was the best publicity stunt I could get. It made the papers back on Earth and all the new tourists are packing into the Harvey Club. Even the other operators are playing my tables. That's why I want you to have this."

He handed Dr. Morton the box. It read "Harvey's Club" in the center, and "Doctor Morton's Poker Chip" around the edge. Across the bottom, it said "Five Thousand."

"That's dollars in it, Professor," said Harvey. "Don't spend it all in one place."

—JACK McKENTY



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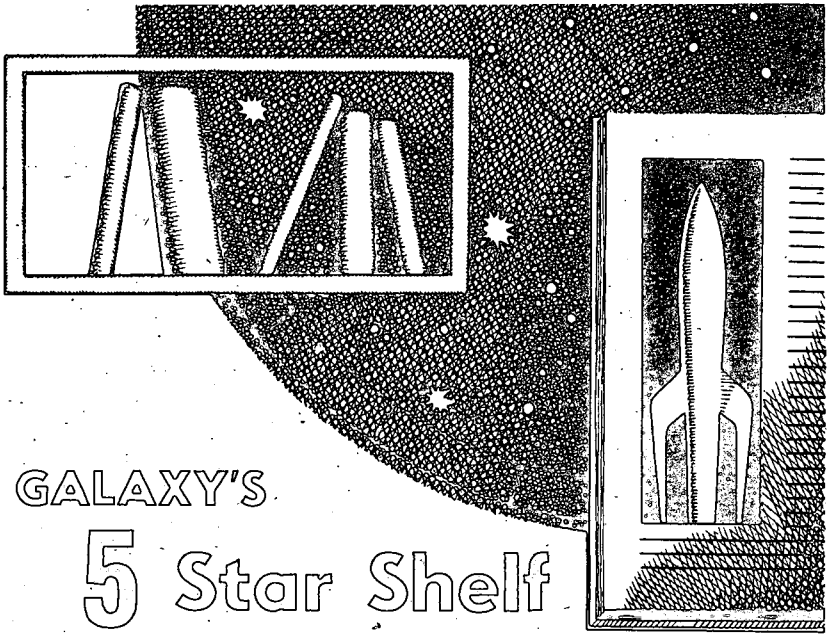

# GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

*PORTALS OF TOMORROW, edited by August Derleth. Rinehart & Co., $3.75*

THE indefatigable Derleth has rung the bell with his fifteenth anthology. This is not only because the story selection is so catholic and type-inclusive, but also because, like a true annual, the book has a complete author index of all science fiction and fantasy published in over 45 different magazines in 1953, as well as a list of the year's outstanding collections of science fiction, fantasy and supernatural stories.

One could only wish that Derleth would publish an author index for 1951 and 1952, so that there would be a complete series of annual supplements to Don Day's invaluable *Index*.

As for the stories, there are very few among the 16 in this book that aren't first class. Among my favorites are Simak's "Kindergarten," Bretnor & Neville's "Gratitude Guaranteed," Fredric Brown's "Rustle of Wings," and Mildred Clingerman's "The Word" and "Stickeney and the Critic."

The other stories, by John An-



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thony, Bradbury, Blish, Clifton & Apostolides, Clarke, John Langdon, Leinster, Mack Reynolds, Seabright, Sheckley and Sherred are all B plus or better by my standards.

A really good collection.

*THE LIVING BRAIN by W. Grey Walter. W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.*, $3.95

JIM Blish called my attention to this exciting and vividly written book, which was published last year. It will be of special interest to GALAXY readers who want to know how near—or how far—we are today from actually realizing some of our extrapolations on the brain.

The author is a British physiologist and a pioneer in the development of electro-encephalography since the war. His book starts with a brilliant review of the whole history of the development of the brain from the very origins of life, eons ago. Then follow a survey of modern electro-encephalography (EEG), a report on modern homeostatic machines that in little ways imitate some of the actions of sentient beings, a short study of the learning process, and an evaluation of the future of modern brain research.

It is an example of scientific popularization at its best.

*NINE TALES OF SPACE AND TIME, edited by Raymond J. Healy. Henry Holt & Co.*, $3.50

HEALY'S second collection of never-before-published science fiction stories is almost, but not quite, up to the original, which came out in 1951.

John W. Campbell, Jr., offers his first fiction in 15 years—and a good story it is, too. David H. Fink, M.D., author of *Release from Nervous Tension,* contributes a remarkable item, the first science fiction he has ever written. One H. L. Gold has written an excellent little tale that is guaranteed to haunt your dreams. Frank Fenton has a sharply satiric bit on the disadvantages of being an egghead in Hollywood.

Other tales are contributed by editors Boucher, McComas and Healy, and writers Bretnor and Neville, the latter with a moving sequel to his "Bettyann," the chef d'oeuvre of Healy's first anthology.

*EDITOR'S CHOICE IN SCIENCE FICTION, compiled by Samuel Moskowitz. The McBride Co.*, $3.50

UNEVENNESS is the hallmark of this anthology. It has some very good stories, several poor ones, and the worst jacket I have ever seen on any



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book. The 12 stories were allegedly selected by the editors of 12 science fiction and weird magazines.

The Clifton-Apostolides "What Thin Partitions," from *Astounding,* is delightful; Arthur Clarke's gentle fantasy of a Moebius strip world, "Wall of Darkness," is Class A, as is Mona Farnsworth's "All Roads," from *Unknown.* Eando Binder's "I, Robot" is important historically; and Harry Bates' "Death of a Sensitive" is almost first rate—with a little cutting, it would be.

The rest of the tales, by Jack Kirkland, Frank B. Long, Wilson Tucker, Chester D. Cuthbert, Robert B. Johnson, Robert W. Chambers and Otis A. Kline, range from passable to awful.

*ENGINEER'S DREAMS* by *Willy Ley. Viking Press,* $3.50

HERE is Ley at his best: an original idea, authoritatively and charmingly carried out. Classed as a " 'teen-age juvenile" by its publishers, the book actually is a collection of stimulating reports on "engineering projects that *could* come true," that can be enjoyed by people of all ages.

Included are the fascinating narratives of the uncompleted tunnel under the English Channel; of various plans for seadromes for stopover points for transatlantic planes; of attempts to harness volcanic energy in Iceland (fantastic!) and at Larderello, Italy; and of the Jordan Valley project, the Congo-Lake-Chad-Sea vision, the plan for damming the Mediterranean, and various other exciting and possible engineering ideas.

The book won the *New York Herald-Tribune*'s annual award for the best in the group of books for older boys and girls, but don't let that dissuade you. It's also dandy for gray-beards of both sexes.

*PLANETS FOR SALE by E. Mayne Hull. Frederick Fell, Inc.,* $2.75

IF you like old-fashioned space opera, this book may be your meat. It has all the subtlety of a broadaxe and none of the maturity of concept or characterization that we expect of good science fiction today—but it is fast-moving, and that's enough for lots of people.

Five of the six novelets from which it has been made constitute the old "Artur Blord" series in *Astounding,* 1943-6, though no acknowledgment of this appears in the book. The tales tell the exploits of superman Artur Blord on the Big Business planets of the Ridge Stars, where everything goes.



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The best clue to the science fiction quality of the book comes from a note Mrs. van Vogt (who uses her maiden name for her stories) has on the jacket: "The great problem was my almost total lack of scientific knowledge. To overcome this handicap, my husband and I figured out a story pattern which would bypass the need to show a science explanation."

And this is the fact. To Mrs. van Vogt, the impossible is achievable simply by writing it down. If you like that sort of anti-logical science fiction, this is for you.

*YEAR'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS*: 1954, *edited by Everett F. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty. Frederick Fell, Inc.*, $3.50

THE third Bleiler-Dikty novelet annual contains five stories, including two that are first-rate.

One is Frank M. Robinson's "The Oceans Are Wide." It's in the grand tradition of Heinlein's "Universe"—the story of a century-long trip to a whole population of Terrans to the planet of a distant star. The only trouble is that it should have been a novel. But even what we get is wonderful.

The other class A item is a good, creepy and very real dimensional tale by one H. L. Gold (hm-m, two in one month, both fine jobs) in collaboration with Robert W. Krepps, called "The Enormous Room."

A pleasant fantasy by Murray Leinster, entitled "The Sentimentalists," which ran in these pages, is also good. Philip K. Dick's "Second Variety" I found rather derivative and portentous. Kendell Crossen's "Assignment to Aldebaran" appealed to me as humor from the pre-adult, or Nat Schachner, stage of science fiction.

These are not the "best novelets" of the year, as a whole, but plenty good enough, most of them.

*THE GIANT ANTHOLOGY OF SCIENCE FICTION, edited by Leo Margulies and Oscar J. Friend. Merlin Press*, $3.95

AND still the anthologies come! This is the fifth for this one month!

Ten longish novelets in 580 pages make this book a good buy, bulk-wise. Science fiction-wise, though, it is pretty much old-fashioned implausible stuff.

There are a handful of good items, including Robert Heinlein's "By His Bootstraps" (previously anthologized under the name Anson MacDonald in the first edition of the Healy-McComas *Adventures in Time and*



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*Space*); a rip-snorting meller-drammer of the future by Henry Kuttner, "Sword of Tomorrow," which is made better than usual by its solid core of social philosophy; and another anti-Utopia by Manly Wade Wellman, "Island in the Sky," which is fast-moving and pointed, and is based on a prophetic imagining of today's "space station."

You may also like Edmond Hamilton's "Forgotten World," Fredric Brown's "Gateway to Darkness" (all about "neutronium"), and Murray Leinster's super-fantastic "Things Pass By."

The other tales, by A. E. van Vogt, and Jack Williamson, left me anything from chilly to freezing.

*G. O. G. 666 by John Taine. Fantasy Press, Inc.,* $3.00

A HERETOFORE unpublished novel by the author of *Before The Dawn, The Crystal Horde, Seeds of Life, etc.,* should be good news, but unfortunately the present story is pretty hard going. It fails because its propaganda smothers its story values. We all know Communists are a bad lot, but the black villains of Taine's imagining become laughable rather than terrible.

"G. O. G. 666," otherwise known as "Gog," is a Russian genetic experiment, half ape, half human; and in the end the monster proves to be more "human" than his Soviet makers.

The story is tortuous and wordy, and will add nothing to its author's reputation.

BRIEF NOTES. Dover Publications has just reissued Sir William Bragg's *Concerning the Nature of Things* ($1.25 in paper), first published in 1925. It's a study of the atom in the fixed-electron period, and has a great deal that's useful and easy to understand on the nature of gases, liquids, and various types of crystals. Excellent for the beginner . . . . The British H. J. Campbell has edited *Sprague de Camp's New Anthology* (around 35c from most science fiction specialist stores); it contains six of de Camp's usual brand of light stories . . . Bradford Day, 127-01 116th Ave., S. Ozone Park, N.W., has issued *An Index to the Weird and Fantastica in Magazines* ($2.00, mimeo.); it contains the tables of contents of all of *Weird Tales* plus seven other short-lived magazines of the same nature, and incomplete listings of similar material from over two dozen other magazines. No author or story title lists, but it should be a useful compilation to lovers of this type of fiction.

—GROFF CONKLIN



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*There is nothing like a good game of hide and seek—if it isn't played by anyone like:*

# JEBABURBA

By DANIEL F. GALOUYE

Illustrated by BARTH



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DISAPPOINTED, Clara reread the last paragraph of the letter over a second cup of breakfast coffee.

In this situation, the Interworld Cooperation Bureau can only advise a generously broad-minded approach, tempered by tolerance. You may convey to your neighbors the sympathy of this department. But, in any thorough analysis, we must all concede that welcoming consuls in our midst is indispensable to cordial interplanetary relations. We are sure that, with this in mind, you will appreciate the necessity of tolerating the behavior of the son of the Consul from Dartha,

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which, after all, is but an expression of a natural psycho-biological characteristic.

The letter was signed by the Secretary of the Bureau.

Impatiently, she slid it back into its envelope and stared helplessly at her husband.

"No soap?" Bob asked tentatively.

Clara sighed. "He says we have to put up with the child—that it's just unfortunate the Consul happens to live in our neighborhood."

"I told you so."

The voices of children in vacation-time play shrilled through the window. With much more abandon, Clara imagined, than at any time since Jebaburba—"Jeb," the kids called him—and his diplomat father had moved into the large house on the corner.

"What are we going to do, Bob?" she asked worriedly.

"*I'm* going to take the express downtown. I'll be at the office for approximately two hours." He rose, glancing at his watch. "Then I'll be at the golf course for the rest of the day."

She frowned irritably. "I'm serious, Bob. *Something* can be done. You could call our Congressman and—"

He laughed and kissed her on the forehead. "Neighborhood gossip, Mrs. Smith's new hat, incorrigible children — all in the same category — woman's responsibility. You take care of the domestic headaches; I'll take care of the business ones. Anyway, all Jeb needs is the application of a hand to the seat of the trousers, which I hardly think is my privilege."

"But—"

But Bob was already out the door and she was alone. Or was she?

HESITANTLY, she glanced around the room—listening, staring apprehensively into each corner.

"Jeb?" she said softly.

A coincidental surge in the clamor outside, spawned by the gang play beneath the window, was the only answer. The exuberant childish laughter was uninhibited now — as though the restraint of having someone 'different' among them was gone for the moment.

"*Jeb,*" she called more loudly.

Tensing, she realized instinctively that he *was* there—just a shade below the level of concrete presence — watching, listening. She could feel it in the special stillness around her.

A piece of marmalade-covered toast elevated itself, moved through the air and disappeared.

Clara lurched up, knocking her chair over. "Jeb!"

"Yes, ma'am." The thin voice came from nowhere.



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"You come out this instant, Jeb!"

The air to one side of the table wavered tremulously, then belched forth a lean, tousled-haired five-year-old. Orange jam covered only a few of the multitudinous freckles on his face.

She stared at him, speechless in her exasperation.

He licked his fingers.

"Whatcha doing, huh, Mrs. Peterson?"

Clara took in a profound breath, then calmed herself in the superficial gesture of smoothing out the bodice of her dress. "Jeb, you will go home to your father and tell him that you were *snooping* again!"

"Yes'm. May I have another slice of bread?"

"*Jeb!*"

The child looked away sheepishly and disappeared.

There was a scream from the breakfast room of the Sanders' home next door. Then Jeb was back, another slice of toast and jelly in his hand.

"Mrs. Sanders' jelly is better, anyway," he testified before he disappeared a second time.

Outside, the gleeful cries of the children were snipped off, as though the window had been closed against them.

Clara glanced out. She had guessed right. The child was with the others now and they were standing around, staring uneasily at him.

"Let's play catcher," Jeb said.

"Not with you," Clara's Bobby protested.

"Not with you! Not with you!" Katherine and Mary chanted.

"No, *thir!*" David declared, his four-year-old lisp flourishing in his indignation. "Mommy thayth for me to thtay away from you."

"You're always viva— viva—" Sammy, six, struggled with the word. "Viva-something."

Katherine turned to run home. "I think Mommy's calling me."

Jeb, grinning mischievously, dropped to his hands and knees, his back arched high like a cat.

He disappeared.

He rematerialized instantly a foot in front of the running Katherine. Her knees struck his back and she catapulted over him, screaming in terror.

"REALLY, Mr. T'Arah," Clara said stiffly, "we are all of the opinion that something should be done about Jeb—Jebaburba."

The Consul General of Dartha proceeded to wipe his glasses. He tactfully avoided looking at the caller he had received in his study. "Of course you realize, Mrs. Peterson, that none of us Darthanians condones such behavior on the part of our children."



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Clara smiled hopefully. "Then you'll see that he doesn't do it again?"

T'Arah's responsive smile was weak and hopeless. "You have a suggestion as to *how* Jebaburba can be corrected?"

"Physical persuasion in the right place. Now if my Bobby should—"

T'Arah laughed. "I assure you, Mrs. Peterson, that your custom of spanking would be quite frustrating if a Darthanian tried it on his child. He would be spanking nothing. Dematerialization, as you call it, is a defense mechanism. A child uses it instinctively."

"You could punish him some other way, then!"

"Lock him in a room, perhaps?"

Clara rose. "Very well, Mr. T'Arah—"

He sprang to his feet. "Don't misinterpret, please. I am very much in sympathy with you and your neighbors. It is my job to promote cordiality with other peoples. But punitive measures such as Earthmen practice can't be applied to Darthanian children. On Darthan, we have to be patient—wait until they reach the age of understanding—make allowances for the fact that a five-year-old is motivated by an insatiable curiosity."

His sympathy and apparent eagerness to pacify were convincing. Hopefully, Clara returned to her seat.

"Believe me, Mrs. Peterson," T'Arah went on, "I shall try again to make him understand. But Jebaburba is only a child. Have you tried to reason with your five-year-old?"

"But isn't there *anything* we can do?"

"I'm afraid not—short of requesting my removal. If you decide on that, I shan't oppose the move. I understand your position."

He paused, then added, "On the other hand, you might be surprised to know that while my son and I present a problem in this neighborhood, there are Earth consuls whose presence on other worlds is equally trying to the inhabitants of those planets."

She looked puzzled.

"You see, Darthanians, too, have the problem of adapting to Earth diplomats who are assigned there. Your race is the only one with impinging thought processes. Although you are all inherently immune to each other's thought emanations, Darthanians lack that immunity and must constantly put up with receiving your subvocal thought-streams."

It was a tactful reminder that his neighbors could be more neighborly and Clara felt somewhat embarrassed for her discourteous attitude.



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T'ARAH folded his arms pensively and leaned back in the chair. "Jebaburba was a problem on my last assignment, too—in Europe. He was playfully aggressive toward one small girl, teased her so much with his vivaporting that we feared the child might become neurotic. We cured him by eliminating his superiority over her. She was instructed in the practice of vivaporting and, when he learned she was his equal, he no longer—"

"Are you suggesting, Mr. T'Arah, that *I* learn how to flit into nowhere and back again?" Clara asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Of course not, Mrs. Peterson. I fear that would be impossible. You lack the—uh—flexibility necessary to acquire the ability. All Earthmen and Earthwomen do. However, there is a possibility of canceling out Jebaburba's sense of superiority, much as we did in Europe. I hadn't mentioned it until now because I doubt seriously that I can arrange for the equipment."

Clara looked up, interested.

"But since you're so distressed, I'm willing to try. I'm going to put in a requisition with the Darthanian Diplomatic Corps for a vivaflux muzzle."

"You mean there *is* something to keep Jebaburba from popping up out of nowhere?" she asked incredulously.

"The muzzle will completely stifle his vivaportive ability—as surely as a blindfold would prevent you from seeing. Our Diplomatic Corps has seven muzzles, available only in emergencies. I doubt that this situation will be classified as an emergency, but I'm willing to put in the requisition."

"But a—a *muzzle!* Will it hurt? Will it affect Jeb?"

"Not at all. It is simply a bracelet of vivaportive-resistant material that can be locked on his wrist. But I don't want to raise your hopes unwarrantedly. I repeat, it is extremely unlikely that one will be available."

The air stirred close to Clara's elbow and she gasped, leaped aside as Jeb sprang into existence.

"'Lo, Mrs. Peterson." The child looked up at her, smiling. "Where's Bobby?"

"Jebaburba," T'Arah began with proper parental severity, "I want you to stop vivaporting. You're not at home now and—"

"'Scuse me," the boy said abstractedly and vanished.

But he was back again in a second, fondling a large Maltese cat that Clara recognized as belonging to the Donnors.

T'Arah scowled at the boy. "Jebaburba! You will return that animal—*now!*"

"Yes, Daddy."



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"And you will not vivaport again!"

"Yes, Daddy," he said, disappearing.

BUT the next week was no more peaceful than the two months since T'Arah had moved into the large gray house and subjected himself and his son to the linguisticators for instant assimilation of the language.

On Monday, the Donnors' cat, Gabby, vanished.

Jebaburba's fondness for the animal immediately attracted suspicion to him. But a visit by the Donnors, accompanied by the Sanderses, to T'Arah's house failed to draw from the child an admission that he was implicated in its disappearance.

Perhaps the Donnors would have been willing to let the matter drop. Gabby might have stolen off to seek subsistence in a more normal neighborhood. But shortly before midnight, the animal's frenzied wails fetched John Donnor from his bed. No question of it—it was Gabby.

A search of the house produced no Gabby, despite the fact that his wailing was mysteriously loudest in the center of the bedroom.

John bracketed the spot of apparent origin of the animal's cries and, deciding he should now be standing over the creature, reached down, groping, as though he might be able to feel what he couldn't see.

Infuriated, the Donnors, escorted this time by the Sanderses and Clara, paid a midnight visit to T'Arah. It seemed that now Jebaburba *could* remember playing with the animal in the late afternoon.

"Where did you leave him?" T'Arah demanded.

Jebaburba looked up sleepily from his pillow. "I think I had him when I went from Bobby's house to see David." He looked at David's mother for confirmation.

Ethel Sanders shook her head. "He popped up at the side of the supper table, wanting to play with David. But Gabby wasn't with him."

"*Think,* Jebaburba!" his father insisted. "What did you do with the animal?"

But the child was asleep.

The Consul General sighed distastefully, tightening his robe around him.

"I'll find the cat."

"Where?" Clara asked dubiously.

"Where? Somewhere in the subvivaplane, of course. Mr. Sanders says he can hear the animal in his bedroom."

The posse, with its one qualified searcher, returned to the Donnor home. T'Arah stood stif-



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fly in the center of the bedroom. Then he disappeared.

A moment later, he was back, hastily disentangling himself from a frightened, clawing Gabby.

That was on Monday.

ON Tuesday, Jebaburba seemed somehow to win the confidence of the children and gain acceptance into their games.

Clara stood at the breakfast room window and watched them sitting silently in the shade of the small oak—doing nothing more harmful than telling stories, she hoped.

"Why don't you forget about those kids?" Bob asked from the table.

He was rested and alert, not having been disturbed in the least by Gabby's outcries during the night.

"I'm worried about them, Bob," she said. "Suppose something should happen?"

"Happen?" he repeated densely.

She went over to him. "That child — Jebaburba. He might be—dangerous!"

Bob laughed. "Darling, aren't you trying to make something serious out of nothing?"

"He made the cat disappear. Suppose—"

"Nonsense. You're upsetting yourself over nothing. If you're worried, just refuse to let Bobby play with him."

She laughed mirthlessly. "Jeb's in and out of this house fifty times a day—even through locked doors. *I* could keep Bobby away from a child like *that?*"

"Even if you could," he said, shrugging, "I guess you shouldn't. The Secretary of the Bureau has asked that we do everything we can to adapt to the situation. Ostracizing a diplomat's child wouldn't help matters any. Anyhow, Jeb isn't a bad kid. Unusual, that's all."

"Not dangerous?"

"Of course not. T'Arah can't allow it, so relax. Nothing to worry about."

After he had gone, she turned back to watch the children. They were no longer on the lawn. Now she could hear their playful cries coming from inside the garage.

Wednesday, Jebaburba seemed to lose his interest in the children and concentrated on the adults with his unintentionally harassing behavior.

"Really," Lucy Donnor told Clara over the visiphone, "I don't believe I can put up with that child another day. He's been in here a thousand times."

"I find," Clara advised, "that he eventually loses interest and leaves you alone for a while if you ignore him."

"*Ignore* him? How can you ig-



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nore anything like that? I put Mary and Katherine in their room for disrespect to their father. Jeb kept them company for a whole hour, without my knowing anything about it, until I heard the rumpus upstairs."

THE visiscreen flickered, then split in half, showing two face frames. Maud Clark joined the conversation.

"Frank and I have decided to take our vacation early," she said. "We've got to get away from that child. We've got to get Sammy away."

Lucy shrugged despairingly. "What good will that do? He'll be here when you get back."

"It'll do a lot of good! Why, that child was under our feet half the morning, without our knowing it! And the things we were talking about! Personal things that families discuss — *you* know."

"I know, all right!" Lucy agreed emphatically.

"You can't ever tell when he's there," Clara complained.

*"Who you talking about, huh, Mrs. Peterson?"*

Clara whirled around, gasping.

Jebaburba stood looking up inquisitively at her. She snapped off the visiphone, wondering why she felt guilty about being surprised in the conversation.

"People like to talk about other people, don't they?" the child observed, glancing past her at the fading screen.

"Now, Jeb," Clara scolded, "that doesn't concern you at all."

The Consul's son laughed. "That's what Mrs. Sanders told me. I heard her telling Mr. Sanders that Mrs. Donnor's new drapes are at—atros—atrosicus. And I asked her what atrosicus was and she said—"

Clara seized him by the shoulders and spun him around, propelling him gently, yet with determination, toward the door.

"I don't care to hear what Mrs. Sanders says about Mrs. Donnor."

"But she says things about you, too. She said Clara—your name's Clara, isn't it?—has a lazy husband. Is Mr. Peterson lazy?"

"Jeb! If you don't leave, I'm going right to your father!"

"Oh, heck!" he protested.

But he gave in—he disappeared.

Even before Clara could let out a breath of relief, however, he was back. "Mrs. Donnor says Mr. Peterson is lazy, too. So it must be true, huh?"

She reached out impulsively for his ear.

Her hand closed on nothing.

ON Thursday, the unexpected appearance of Jebaburba at the table, as she and Bobby were



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eating lunch, drove Clara to the limit of her patience. It wasn't because she dropped the platter of cold cuts on the floor. She had been in a keen state of nervous anxiety all morning, anticipating his inevitable arrival while she traced, via visiphone, his wanderings through the neighborhood. And now suddenly, shockingly, he was here.

The tension exploded in a flow of near-hysterical tears and she rudely ordered him from the house in a tone so severe that he left without a protest.

Another talk — a desperate one this time—with the Consul General was in order. She left the kitchen without even cleaning up the mess.

Absently, she drew water for her bath, wondering how she could make T'Arah search for some way to force his son to observe the customs of Earth. It was evident by now that no viva-flux muzzle would be coming from Dartha—if it were, it would already have arrived.

She might influence his father to send Jebaburba back to Dartha, for a while at least. That hope heartened her as she undressed and slipped into the tub of warm water.

She sighed, lathering herself briskly. At this interview, she was determined, there would be no concessions.

Bobby's knock sounded at the door. "Mommy, can I go out and play?"

"Yes, dear. But stay clean. Your father'll be home in a little while."

"I will."

"And, Bobby—don't play with Jeb if you can avoid it."

"Why, Mommy?"

"Never mind why. If he shows up and wants to play with you and the other children, you come back inside."

"Oh, but Jeb's fun now. He used to be mean and he used to play tricks on us. But . . ."

The din of children's voices rose from outside, drowning out her son's words.

"Never mind that," she said after the clamor had subsided. "Stay away from him. Don't hurt his feelings. Just excuse yourself and come in the house."

In the silence, she could sense her boy standing sullenly outside the bathroom.

"And, Bobby," she called, "if he tries to—take you anywhere, like he did the cat, you tell him you won't go."

There was no answer.

"Bobby! I know you're out there!" She stared at the door impatiently. "You'd better answer me!" Considering the way he customarily stomped down the hall, it was ridiculous for the child to believe he could deceive



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her into thinking he'd left.

*"Bobby's outside, playing, Mrs. Peterson."*

CLARA lurched up, splashing a wave of water on the floor. Jebaburba was standing next to the wash basin, playing with the faucets.

She slumped down again, sending another billow over the rim of the tub as she snatched for the washrag to hold in front of her.

"Gee, Mrs. Peterson. Are you drowning or something, huh?"

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He left the wash basin and started over toward her, concerned.

"Get away!" Clara warned, near tears as she squirmed sideways and grabbed for the towel hanging from its rack.

She managed to float it over her just as Jebaburba reached the side of the tub. She cringed in horror from the child.

"You all right, Mrs. Peterson?"

"Get out!" she screamed. "Get out! You—you little monster!"

Jebaburba's eyes opened wide. Then he backed away, starting to cry.

"You don't like me! Nobody likes me and I wish I was somewhere else!"

"Then go home—do anything—but get out of here!"

His sobs became more crushing and his face flushed until his freckles were hardly noticeable.

Bewildered, Clara stared at him. After all, he *was* only a child. She found her robe and squirmed into it.

Then she knelt before him and

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held him by the shoulders. "Don't you know, Jeb, that you can't just pop up in people's bathrooms?"

"I can't?" He looked up at her, surprised. "Why, Mrs. Peterson?"

Her mouth twisted helplessly. "Never mind, Jeb. Just go on outside and play."

"And you're not mad at me any more?" he asked eagerly.

"Go out and play, Jeb," she insisted. "We'll talk about that later on."

He smiled. Then he was gone.

She glanced uncertainly at the tub, considering a quick rinse. But she prudently decided against it.

A HALF-HOUR later, after she had dressed nervously, she was next door in the Sanders' living room, relating her experience to the other girls in a hastily convened council on strategy.

"This morning," said Ethel, when Clara was through, "I had to chase him out of the bedroom before I could get out of bed."

Maud shook her head disconsolately. "And I finally found out what happened to that stole I left on the hall rack last night. I had to plead with him to get it from—from wherever he usually hides things."

"*Well!*" Lucy exclaimed in desperation. "I'm willing to do anything after finding him playing with my Mary and Katherine in the downstairs hall last night —two hours after we had all gone to bed!"

Clara confronted the group. "Suppose we call on Mr. T'Arah and explain just what has been happening?"

"Some of it will be rather embarrassing," Maud said.

"Do you think he'll understand our position?" Ethel asked.

"We'll make him!" Clara clenched her fists in determination. "We'll tell him that there's too wide a difference between Earth and Darthanian customs and we can't allow our children to play with Jebaburba."

Lucy, standing by the window, turned around. "They're all playing with him now," she announced. "They're in the shed again."

"We'll put a stop to that!" declared Ethel angrily. "We'll—"

She stopped, looking past the other women at her son, who was standing in the doorway.

"What is it, David?" she asked, annoyed.

He came over and pulled her down to whisper in her ear.

"Gone?" she repeated. "Gone where?"

The child whispered again.

"Speak up, David!" Ethel ordered. "What about Bobby?"



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"Bobby!" Clara cried in alarm.

David turned to her. "He'th gone. Jeb held hith hand under the tree and they went to the shed. Only, when Jeb got in the shed, Bobby was gone."

"Oh, *no!*" Clara whispered hoarsely. "Oh, Lord, *no!*" She clutched the boy's arms frantically. "They *walked* to the shed?"

"No, ma'am. Jeb viva— viva —he wath juth trying to show him how to go away."

Sobbing frantically, Clara led the exodus from the house.

SAMMY, running up the steps, intercepted them. Maud stopped to lift him into her arms.

"Where's Bobby?" she demanded.

"Gone, Momma. He's gone."

Clara bit back a scream.

"Where's Jeb?" Maud asked.

"He's gone, too."

"Oh, God!" Clara pleaded as they raced across the lawn toward Katherine and Mary, who were standing helplessly under the tree next to the driveway.

"Jeb's daddy called him," Sammy explained. "He had to go home."

Clara hardly noticed Lucy clutching Mary and Katherine to her.

"Bobby!" she shouted. "*Bobby!* Where *are* you!"

"Bobby?" Ethel said weakly, groping as though in the dark. "Are you here, Bobby?"

Frantically, Clara moved in aimless circles around the yard, in and out of the garage and shed and around the tree, terror making her steps unsteady.

She tried to calm herself. He *had* to be safe! He *had* to be somewhere nearby — even though it might be in what was *nowhere* to Jeb and his father. The Donnors' cat had disappeared and had come back safely, hadn't it? But they had known the animal was near. They had heard its cries. Why couldn't she hear Bobby speaking? Why couldn't she hear him calling for her?

Exhausted, she dropped to the bench under the trees. Ethel came over and put her arm around her.

"Don't get excited, Clara," she comforted. "Maud's gone to get Mr. T'Arah. He'll do something."

In the panic that stifled her, the nightmares of all the possible things that could be happening to her son raced terrifyingly through her mind.

SHE was crying uncontrollably when the heavy hand touched her shoulder. She looked up into the Consul General's face.

"Don't be frightened, Mrs. Peterson," T'Arah said. "There's no danger. We'll get Bobby back."

"Where is he?" she sobbed. "Where *is* he?"



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"He's only in the subvivaplane —where the Donnors' cat was. We'll have him back in a moment. And, Mrs. Peterson, you'll be glad to hear that the viviflux muzzle got here. I've already locked it on Jebaburba's wrist. He's behaving just like your Earth children now."

There was no feeling of relief. "Get Bobby," she pleaded.

T'Arah turned around and whipped out of sight.

A minute passed—five—fifteen. The women stood around speechlessly. Katherine and Mary and Sammy and David huddled fearfully next to the house.

T'Arah burst into existence in front of them, frowning in vexation.

"They went via either a second or a third subplane, I imagine," he explained embarrassedly. "It may take a little longer, Mrs. Peterson, but I'll find him."

T'Arah vanished once more.

Clara, afflicted with an almost numbing anxiety, waited.

Jebaburba crossed the street and stood well away from the women, compassionately watching them and the children. The metallic bracelet on his wrist, locked there with a key, glistened as the sunlight struck it.

He came over. "Gee, Mrs. Peterson, I was only trying to show the . . ."

Clara wept and turned from him. Ethel made a disgruntled sound that was somewhat like a growl.

"I didn't think . . ." the child began again contritely. "You see, with David and Sammy and Katherine and Mary . . ."

MAUD glowered at him, raised a finger to shake it in his face. Then, exasperated, she sighed and turned from the child, too.

Jebaburba glanced at the other children. "Can I go play with them, huh? Can I play with them, Mrs. Donnor?"

Lucy drew her shoulders back threateningly and stepped toward the child, reaching for him.

Ethel stopped her. "He's only a little—"

T'Arah popped into view before them—with Bobby.

Clara grasped the child and held him desperately, crying into his tousled blond hair.

"There, now," T'Arah said proudly. "Didn't I tell you everything would be all right?"

"Gee, Mom," Bobby exclaimed reassuringly, "I wasn't lost —not really. Jeb didn't have anything to do with it. I was trying . . ."

But Clara pulled him more tightly against her, squeezing the breath from him. "Oh, Bobby! *Bobby!*"

After a long while, she smiled



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and bravely wiped the tears from her face.

T'Arah beamed, rubbed his hands together enthusiastically. "Now all our problems seem to be solved. You had no idea how concerned I was over the fact that Jebaburba wasn't being fully accepted by you and your children."

He held his son's arm up so all could see the bracelet. "But everything's all right now. And he'll be able to play with them as much as he wants without annoying anybody."

The women looked guardedly at one another.

"Can I play with the kids now?" Jebaburba pleaded with all of them.

"Do you object to his associating with them?" T'Arah asked cautiously.

Clara glanced at the other women. Lucy and Ethel shook their heads. Maud smiled briefly.

"Of course not, Mr. T'Arah," Clara said. "Certainly Jeb can play with the children.

Jebaburba emitted a whoop and lunged across the lawn, seemingly unconcerned about the vivaflux muzzle and the restraint it put on him.

All the children were happy. The girls and David and Sammy held hands and raced into the garage. Jebaburba and Clara's boy followed more slowly.

"Come on, Bobby," the alien's son coaxed as they neared the door. "We'll start with . . ."

T'Arah turned to the women.

"Both Dartha and myself are indebted to you ladies for demonstrating the extreme diplomatic usefulness of the vivaflux muzzles. Although there are no more available now, within three years we expect to be able to start production on many others."

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IN her bedroom, Clara was a battlefield for the conflict between exhaustion and relief that raged within her. Numb from the experiences of the day, she drew down the shades and undressed, stretching across the bed secure in the knowledge there was no more danger for her son—no more possibility of her being surprised by the innocent but appallingly curious Jebaburba.

She was almost asleep when the sharp cry sounded, alarmingly close.

She sat up in bed.

Sammy, grinning, leaped from the dresser and landed on the floor. Mary materialized on the dresser and sprang down as Sammy hopped onto the bed and disappeared, shouting gleefully. When Mary reached the spot of Sammy's disappearance, Katherine and Bobby popped into existence atop the dresser.

"Follow the leader! Follow the leader!" cried Bobby exuberantly. Then he spied his dumfounded mother. "Didja see, Mom? I can really do it now, can't I?"

On the bed, he vanished, too.

But Katherine didn't.

Bobby reappeared beside her. Clara stared up at them in grim stupefaction.

"Come on, Katy," Bobby urged, taking her hand. "Follow the leader! It's easy. Do it just like Jeb showed us."

The two children dematerialized abruptly and Sammy reappeared—close to the wall, running across the floor.

Clara, tearing herself from the paralysis of horrified bewilderment, clutched a sheet about her, raced into the closet and slammed the door.

Two tiny hands landed grubbily against her.

"*Boo,* Mithuth Peterthon! Which way did they go?"

—DANIEL F. GALOUYE

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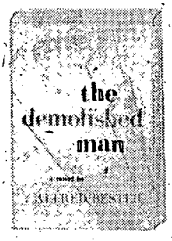


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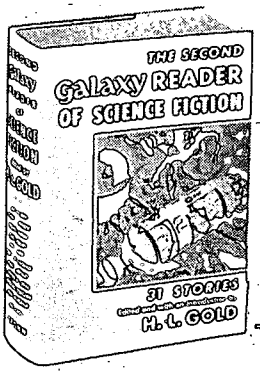


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# SPY

By J. T. McINTOSH

***Corvey lived, laughed, loved, killed and died a thousand times . . . but which one of all these lifetimes was actually his own?***

CORVEY fought it off until he had finished writing his story, read it through, put it down the chute, glanced through all the odds and ends which piled up every day on a survey reporter's desk and checked with the feature sub-editors to make sure there were no queries about his story. Only then did he leave the *Star* building.

He held it off while he walked the three blocks to the Jewel Café. He would have preferred taking a taxi or even a bus, for his legs felt rubbery and his head ached with a quiet, subdued, monotonous throb that swelled with every jarring step and ebbed as he forced one shaky, uncertain



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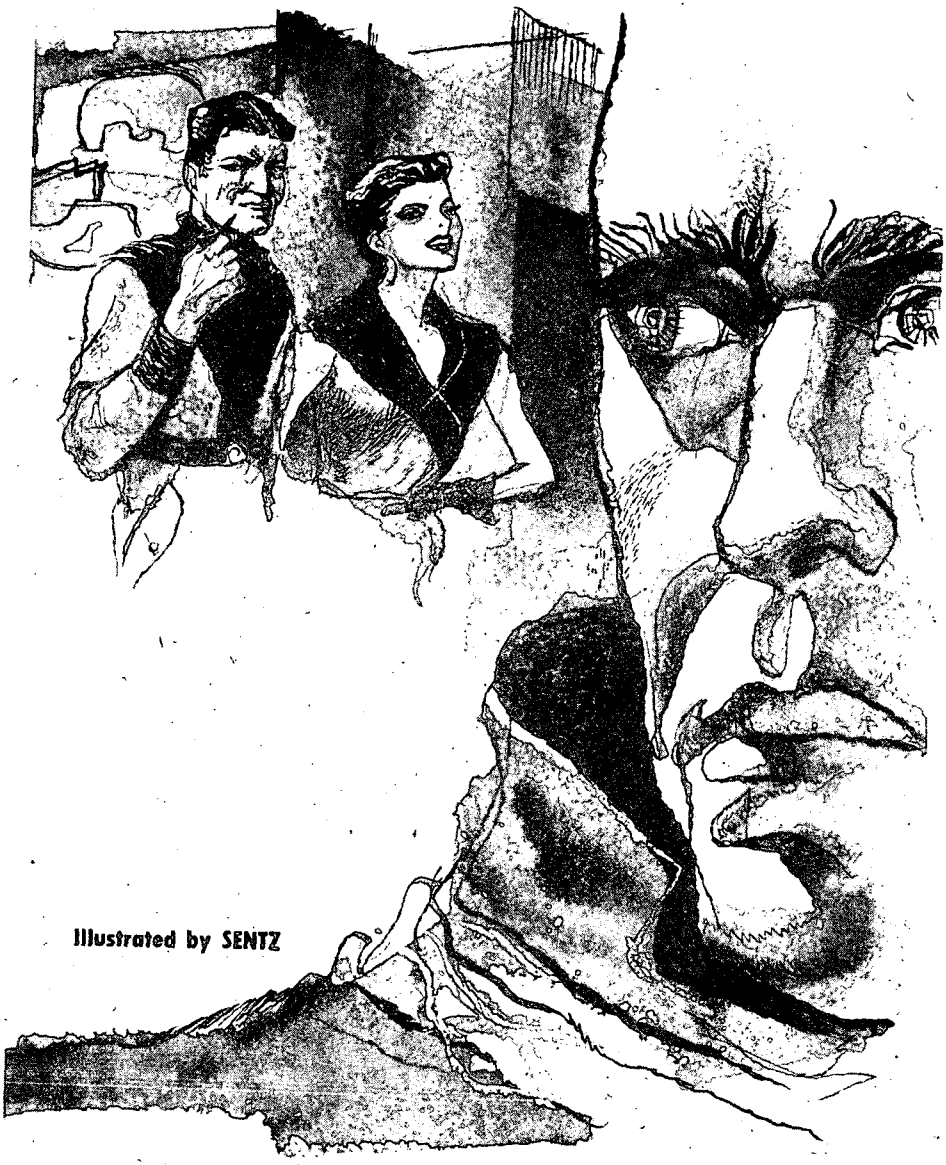

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leg past the other. But buses and particularly taxis were dangerously soothing. It was safer, though less pleasant, to walk.

It was a constantly recurring question whether to frequent places where he was known and would arouse no real suspicion even if his behavior were strange, or places where he was unknown but might be remembered as a queer character if anything happened. On previous occasions, expecting something, he had been able to decide one way or the other was safer. Tonight he didn't feel he had the energy to cope with a new restaurant. He went to the Jewel automatically, hoping that he would go on acting automatically, behaving as he had on hundreds of other evenings.

He fought it off while he went into the café, found a dark corner well out of the way, smiled in his usual friendly but unsuggestive manner at Rosie, the prettiest waitress, and ordered ham and eggs.

THE Jewel was a pleasant refuge for people whose apartments were merely places to sleep and shave in the mornings. It was unpretentious, shabby without being dirty, and the food showed a reasonable balance between quality and expense. If one wanted no more than a cup of coffee, that was all right. If one wanted seven courses, that was all right, too.

When he had his food in front of him, he was able at last to loosen the desperate grip he had been keeping on himself all day. Little by little he let go, the relief of being able to relax spreading delightfully through him in a warm, grateful flood.

It was ironic, almost irritating, to find that, when he did let go, nothing happened. He wouldn't have known if anything had, but it was possible to be almost sure of the negative. You didn't know you were dreaming when you were. You could always, however, satisfy yourself that you were not.

In places where he wasn't known, he could never quite let go. When things were unfamiliar anyway, it was all the more difficult to keep in touch with reality. The corresponding disadvantage of going to a place like the Jewel was that people were liable not to leave him alone.

He had barely started on his ham and eggs when a breath of familiar crushed-petal perfume, mingled with a whiff of light, dry pipe tobacco, announced Babs and Dave Andrews.

Without looking up he said, "No, none of these seats are taken."

"There he goes again," Babs exclaimed, "making out that we



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smell." She folded herself violently around him from behind and kissed him moistly. Babs was one of those young wives who have a habit of making love to other men in their husband's company. She still startled Corvey occasionally. He was rather glad that he had never met Babs without Dave.

She dropped lightly in the chair on one side of him, while Dave settled himself more ponderously on the other side.

"You look tired, Ken," Dave observed.

"I am. Dead beat."

"But not off your feed, I see."

"Hell, I'm only tired, not ill."

"You've been tired a lot lately." Babs sounded concerned.

It was vexing how shrewd and observant people could be when you didn't want them to be shrewd and observant.

"It's nothing," Corvey said, shrugging. "You know the newspaper business—you have to be up a little earlier than the next fellow, work a little harder, be a little cleverer, find out a little more. It's not surprising that you finish the day tired."

"You should get your doctor to give you a check-up, all the same."

Ken Corvey shrugged as if it didn't matter.

Of course it mattered. Dave was right—he needed medical attention. But he simply couldn't risk it. All he could do, when the subject came up, was to treat it casually and hope it would soon be dropped.

Babs was small, light, quick and restless. She always sat forward on the edge of her chair, as if on the point of leaping in the air like a frog. Dave was heavy, slow and clumsy, like an overfed dog. He looked older than Babs, which wasn't so. As nearly as they could reason, Babs had been born thirty-six minutes before him, although they hadn't met until twenty-two years later. When they did, it was immediately obvious—to them, at any rate—that they were made for each other. They were married within six weeks and, in the intervening seven years, had frequently congratulated each other on their perspicacity.

ANOTHER illusion was exploded when they stripped for swimming. Corvey had already had it exploded for him, but he noticed it forcibly once more the time he met them at the Rutledge Country Club.

He had driven out for a swim that he hoped would kill the dull headache and, though he looked squarely at the man who had been changing into swimming trunks in the next cubicle, he almost passed him without a



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sign of recognition — for Dave, when dressed, appeared to be fat, flabby and out of condition. This man was burly and powerful, with a very handsome torso. Still, it was Dave, all right.

"Pretending not to notice me, huh?" Dave inquired, which was quite a good crack, since he weighed over 200 pounds.

And then, as they made their way to the pool, with Corvey still casting occasional incredulous glances at the you-too-can-have-a-body-like-mine character with him, Babs emerged from the women's dressing-rooms — and she was as big a surprise as Dave, in reverse. Babs, in clothes, seemed wonderful. Obviously, she should never put on beachwear. Her knees were too bony, her thighs too thin, her stomach too flat, the cage of her ribs too visible, her collar-bone positively scrawny. Her bathing suit left no figure fault unrevealed.

Dave showed himself still in love with her, by saying admiringly, "Isn't she gorgeous?" And believing it.

They swam for twenty minutes or so, which was enough for Corvey to lose his headache. Afterward, sprawled in the late afternoon Sun, Dave and Babs asked him about his job, just making conversation.

"What is a survey reporter, anyway?" Babs asked.

"Survey reporting is a fairly new thing," he told them. "Remember the old polls, public opinion surveys, random samples and all the rest of it? I just do the same job without the expense of the survey."

"You mean you guess?"

"No, I get my results by a short-cut. The main difficulty in any random sample prediction or test was always the *random* part of it. If you wanted to know how a billion people were going to react, you couldn't be sure you did know, even if you tested a million. Your method of collecting the million might have been biased.

"But if you could be sure you really had a random group, your million would be quite enough. In fact, if there was any way of knowing that *ten* people were truly representative, they'd be enough. There was no way until recently—so, merely to cancel out bias, it was necessary to take vast samples. Hundreds, thousands, even tens of thousands."

"You say, 'until recently,'" Dave observed. "I should say forever and ever. How can you possibly be sure ten people are properly representative?"

"We can't, really," Corvey admitted. "I'm oversimplifying, of course. There was always what was known as a weighted sample. The statisticians limited the num-



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ber of the sample by making it a cross-section. Doctor, lawyer, Indian chief. Following up this principle of weighing, I can generally get from a few small sets—in a series of tests—the same result I'd get from a huge random sample. It's a method of eliminating bias by mathematics and common sense."

"Bet you're often wrong," Babs objected.

"No more often than the past surveys were. I generally split up what I want to know into about ten elements, get ten answers, none of which is individually trustworthy, integrate them so that the variations cancel each other—"

"And guess," said Babs, in satisfaction. "I knew it would come to that in the end."

DAVE and Corvey grinned at each other—Corvey helplessly, Dave fondly. To Dave, everything Babs did was wonderful. If she made a remark, it was bound to be a good one because she made it. If anybody beat her at anything, the anybody must be pretty good.

Yet Dave, in things which didn't concern Babs, was very shrewd indeed.

"And then," he said, "in addition, there's your other job."

"Other job?" Corvey echoed.

"Your real job. We know you, Ken. Think we don't know you're a spy?"

They were looking at him without hostility, merely amused that he should have thought they didn't know.

"Why, do I look like a spy?" Corvey asked reasonably, trying by sheer will power to keep his breathing steady and his pulse rate slow, trying to act as if it really were a fantastic idea.

"You wouldn't be much good as a spy if you did," Babs observed; then she and Dave burst out laughing. "Who's your beautiful accomplice?"

He didn't have a beautiful accomplice, but Sandra Reid was beautiful, all right. It would be nice to have her as an accomplice. She was that amazing phenomenon, an intelligent girl who acted like a tart, a tart who acted like a nice girl, a nice girl who looked like a particularly seductive movie star, all in one.

He looked down at her as she lay with her eyes closed, unaware of his presence. He would have liked, very much, to spend a long time studying Sandra Reid.

But there was a time and place for everything, except Sandra. There was no time, no place for Sandra and himself. Or, if there ever should be, this certainly wasn't it.



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He mustn't have anything to do with Sandra.

As he was on the point of going away—really going away—she opened her eyes. And he missed something.

". . . ill?" Dave asked.

Corvey searched his mind but failed to find the rest of the sentence. That rarely happened.

Dave was waiting. Corvey couldn't answer the question, couldn't refuse to answer it, couldn't ignore it and didn't see how he could ask for a repetition.

He checked rapidly. *Was this real?*

Of course it was real. And Dave was waiting.

"Sorry, Dave," said Corvey. "Just remembered something I should have done this afternoon and didn't. What were you saying?"

"I said, is that why you're reluctant to take a few days off, even when you're ill?"

That didn't help much. "Is what why?" Corvey had to ask.

"The fact that there are so few survey reporters, and nobody can finish another man's job."

"OH, that," said Corvey, relieved. He didn't mind talking about his job. He was so glad the conversation he had missed had been on such a harmless subject that he said something completely unnecessary. "I told you a little about my job the other day, didn't I?"

"The other day?"

"At the Country Club."

Dave stared at him. "We haven't been at the Country Club for weeks."

"Oh, it must have been someone else," said Corvey easily, though he was sweating. The Country Club episode must have been a false memory. It had never happened. He might have known that from the way it collapsed and dissolved at the end—but he hadn't had time to examine it yet.

"You really are sick, Ken," Dave said, concerned.

Corvey shook his head. "Absent-mindedness is a sort of occupational disease among survey reporters," he said. "I'm working on a lot of tricky problems just now, too. And I'm *tired*—heavens, how tired I am."

"Leave Ken alone, Dave," said Babs sympathetically. "He's just sleepy. Come on, let's take him home and put him to bed."

Though Corvey protested, they did just that. Twice, before they left him, he checked desperately, sure that this couldn't really be happening. But it was.

Corvey's father had once told him, "Judge your friends by what they'll do for you, son." On that basis, Babs and Dave were



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his best friends—and not merely on Earth.

Alone at last, safe, comfortable in bed, in the dark, he longed for sleep. But he had some thinking to do first.

Tonight had been the worst so far. If Dave and Babs had known anything about ritany, they'd have seen he was suffering from it and was therefore a non-Terrestrial.

Fortunately, no one outside the Jernam system — and that was ninety-seven light years away—knew much about ritany, which was a fever peculiar to Aram, the fifth planet. As far as Corvey knew, no one had ever had an attack outside Aram. When he had been sent to Earth, perhaps it had been assumed that, because it hadn't happened, it never would happen.

Corvey was a hospital case, yet he couldn't risk hospitalization. If he did, for a few hours or days the doctors would be puzzled—but eventually they would test for extra terrestrial diseases and diagnose ritany. True, that wouldn't be a hanging matter. If his Aramin origin were on record, it would be no offense at all to have ritany. But for Kenneth Corvey, survey reporter on the *Rutledge Star* with a manufactured history going back through 31 years to a counterfeited birth in New York, to turn out to be a native of the planet Aram . . .

He would obviously be a spy. And they still shot spies, he believed. Spies had to be discouraged, somehow. There was no guarantee they would shoot him —much, much less that they would not.

There were no arrangements to get him home to Aram until his job would be over, successfully or unsuccessfully, in three weeks. Could he last three weeks?

He could go away somewhere and live quietly until the time came for him to leave Earth. By so doing, he would save his life, at the expense of the job he had been sent to do. Or he could stay where he was and probably fail in his job as well as lose his life. But as long as there was a chance of success, he had to stay.

WHAT were the chances? On the basis of this night's attack, no good. Spies always had to tread carefully in case some tiny, unsuspected difference betrayed them.

Corvey had another handicap to add to the crushing total. He was in the grip of a fever which weakened his limbs and thus diminished his control over them, which made his head ache continuously, causing him to shiver uncontrollably sometimes — and which gave him sporadic delusions.



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It was a physical, not a mental illness. The hallucinations that accompanied it were not markedly psychotic. This made them all the more difficult to identify. They were not simply wish-fulfillments, or memories, or fears, or warnings, or guilt feelings, or any of the other things which formed the material of ordinary dreams.

Generally they were extrapolations of what was actually happening — there was nothing whatever to show that they were delusions. Corvey might easily have been at the Country Club with Dave and Babs. Only Dave's saying that Corvey was a spy was bizarre, like something in an anxiety dream. On the other hand, when Dave and Babs put him to bed, it was hard to believe it was really happening, was not part of some crazy scene his fevered mind was putting him through.

ONE of the worst things about ritany was that memories were memories, and it was difficult to judge whether a recollection was a memory of an event or of a ritanic delusion. When he mentioned the incident at the Country Club, Corvey had been aware of no risk. He hadn't checked mentally over the whole incident to make sure it had all happened. He had merely remembered talking to Dave and Babs about his job at the Country Club.

What he did when he was in the middle of a delusion, he had no way of knowing. From other cases, back on Aram, he knew that a victim of ritany would often act normally, convincingly and for long periods, from sheer habit. On a world where ritany was familiar, of course, it was easily identified and cured. On Earth . . . ?

The cure was simply a month in bed. The hallucinations of ritany, not being psychosomatic in origin, were harmless and, provided the patient stayed flat on his back, the fever died, the delusions faded and, ultimately, nothing remained except memories of some very vivid dreams, neither pleasant nor unpleasant as a rule. Only psychotics had violently disturbing hallucinations.

However, Corvey couldn't go to bed. If he did, a doctor would visit him almost automatically. He'd then have to pretend to be normal, which would not only place him in danger of discovery, but would also prevent the fever from breaking.

He wasn't a weak character—interstellar spies could hardly be weak. But sometimes the danger, the fever, the difficulty of his job, the unattainability of the one thing he really wanted—to stay in bed and rest—piled up and became too much for him. At such



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times he wanted, actually wanted, to be discovered. He wanted it to be over and done with.

## II

IN the morning he felt terrible, but at least there was very little risk of further delusions. In the morning, his headache was at its worst, his fever only moderate. He could do a good morning's work before ritany took hold of him again.

Just before he left the office for lunch, Jim Neave, the feature editor and, to all intents and purposes, his boss, sent for him. Corvey was on the day shift, since much of his business was with people in their normal pursuits.

Neave was about fifty, a hearty, apparently superficial character. Corvey knew his boss's manner was merely the building in which he worked and had ceased to pay much attention to Neave's eccentricities. He knew that, when Neave praised anybody expansively, or seemed to delight in his own cleverness, or talked at length about something not very important, no conclusion could be drawn except that Neave had something on his mind and found it necessary to throw a veil over it.

He was a good man to work for, though. He seemed to know everyone's capacities, he always asked for just a little less than he was going to get, always gave credit for anything over demand.

"Look, Ken," said Neave, "you're working too hard."

"Maybe a little," Corvey admitted cautiously.

"Why?"

"It's the nature of my job," he said. "It has to happen sometimes. Somebody else could hire an assistant, but an assistant wouldn't be any good to me. No one can follow through on any survey reporter's line of investigation except himself. It's like a train of thought. Someone else can think, may even reach the same conclusion, but he can't reach it the same way. I will admit I'm pretty tired."

Neave nodded. "Let's see," he said, looking through a black notebook. "We'll need your story on settlement recruitment . . ."

"Nearly ready."

"And the survey on comparative intelligence in America and Europe — how's it coming? We need an answer to that London professor."

"I'll have it by Saturday."

"After that, there's nothing vital until you start the big series on the defense tests. No, I'm not going to brief you on that yet. Tell you what, Ken. If you put in for a week starting Saturday, I'll see you get it."

"Thanks, Jim. I'll do that. I



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know I could do with a rest."

Corvey was pleased, and didn't try to conceal it. A week of convalescing wouldn't finish the ritany, but it might enable him to carry on.

THE welfare state idea had spread around the world. People had a lot of freedom, certainly. But the root idea of the welfare state was security—and security meant certain restrictions. Some things had to be automatic, and the health service was one of them. Anyone who was absent from work two days was visited by a doctor.

Corvey could take a week's holiday if it were offered. If it weren't, asking for it might lead to a medical check-up he couldn't refuse. Staying off work for two days would have the same result.

Things had worked out better than he could have hoped, for he hadn't been with the *Star* long enough to rate any vacation.

He lunched alone after seeing Neave. Leaving the restaurant, he almost ran into Sandra's arms —a good place to be, though he had hitherto refused to acknowledge his awareness of the fact.

"You're looking very pleased with yourself," she said. "Won a bet?"

Corvey told her about the week's holiday.

"That's great," said Sandra. "Let's go have a drink to celebrate."

Sandra was popular with every male of her acquaintance, young or old, and disliked by almost every woman. Babs hated her.

They went to a cocktail bar, all mirrors, a really delightful little place. Sandra, sitting on a high stool and toasting him, was exquisite. She was a dark blonde who had resisted the temptation to become a golden blonde. She carried not an ounce too much flesh and not an ounce too little. She had the great gift, a rare quality, of taking charge without seeming to, so that the man she was with thought himself very enterprising, indeed.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

He shrugged. "South somewhere—Florida, I guess."

"Now it just so happens," said Sandra, "that I was thinking of taking a week in Miami, myself."

"Fine," declared Corvey, the whisky he had just downed killing both the fever and his headache and making him feel wonderful. "We'll fly down together."

Presently he found himself kissing Sandra. It was very nice, as he had known it would be. It was twice as nice as he had expected.

They agreed to meet on the



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Saturday afternoon plane and had another drink or two to pledge it.

IT was in the middle of a series of calculations in the afternoon that Corvey became aware that it had really happened.

He had had an attack of ritany once before, on Aram. Usually it happened only once, like measles, but occasionally people had a second or even a third attack before the particular bug which caused it became harmless.

During his previous attack—under the right conditions, of course—he had learned how to treat it. Now he had to fight the delusions and couldn't help worrying, for fear of revealing his true identity.

He had allowed the incident with Sandra to go as it liked, there being no apparent immediate danger. He hadn't even tried to settle the question of whether it was really happening or not, had taken for granted that it wasn't. It had the airiness, the casualness, the lack of detail that was typical of a ritanic hallucination. Only in such a delusion would he go out to a bar with a girl he hardly knew, tell her he was going to Florida, kiss her and agree to meet her on the plane. That was the stuff of which dreams were made.

But, on reflection, he was certain that it had actually happened.

He could be quite rational and he could always distinguish between true and false, when he really thought about it.

Going away with Sandra was quite out of the question. He had to find the easiest way out. Simply not meet Sandra? No, that wouldn't do. Tell her he had changed his mind? Yes, if he could find a good reason. Go where she wouldn't go?

Once more he was brought face to face with the irony of being a spy. Nothing would suit him better than a vacation with Sandra. If he weren't a spy, nothing would be easier than to cut loose from her. If he weren't a spy, she probably wouldn't have become sufficiently intrigued to want to join him. If he weren't a spy . . .

HE was in Jan Ryter's office, on Aram. Vaguely, this time he knew it was a delusion. But he let it run on, as a man who knows he must get up soon allows himself to drowse just a few minutes more — for Ken felt it was grand to be home for a while. Having made that decision, he promptly lived the scene. That was the way of ritany.

"I could be sociable, Corvey," Ryter was saying coldly, "but this is an unsentimental business, and I think we'd both prefer to



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save our sentiment for off-duty hours. Right?"

Corvey nodded.

"Well, what have you accomplished, Corvey? If it's nothing, say so."

"It's more than nothing. Planting me as a survey reporter has been successful in that I've been detailed to do a whole series of surveys on the defense tests. I haven't been able to find out what information will be available to me when the tests start and what will be denied. But if I'm expected to produce any significant results, I have reasonable grounds for demanding just about everything."

"Is your position in any way official?"

"No, I'm merely a newspaper representative, and all my material will be screened before publication. But I'll have to know much more than I use, of course."

"Have you any ideas on what your conclusions will be?"

"I think," said Corvey carefully, "I'll find that Earth's defenses are remarkably good, that they will suggest offensive weapons which would make the result of any war against us a foregone conclusion—and that there will be no particular suggestion of animosity or prospective conflict against anybody, ourselves no more than the other colonies."

Ryter nodded. "I must thank you for a decided, clear and frank statement."

ABRUPTLY Corvey was staring at a column of figures which didn't make sense — no longer on Aram, but in Rutledge, U.S.A., Earth. He must have done quite a bit of calculation unconsciously — slowly but correctly—on the colonial settlement program.

It was astonishing that he could have failed to notice it before—it was obvious, now, that the colonists were a highly selected group. All colonists, in any colony.

Earth had over four billion inhabitants, but the world wasn't really overcrowded. Not with efficient agricultural methods and half a dozen hydroponics plants in every state. It was natural for a young man, or a young family, to stay put.

Only a particular type—rather, several particular types — would leave Earth.

This obvious fact, which he had not previously seen, ruined several hours' work.

Jim Neave came into Corvey's little office while he was still considering the matter. Corvey pointed it out to him.

Neave frowned. "I'm no survey man, Ken, but that's the first thing I'd have thought of. Only someone who was a colonist him-



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self would be likely to miss that angle."

Corvey had been trained long ago not to show any sign of shock in such circumstances. He merely said, "That's so. I suppose I was working from the colonial viewpoint," and talked of something else — his week in Florida.

It was another instance of the kind of thing which could happen to a spy at any moment. Sooner or later someone, unlike Babs and Dave, unlike Jim Neave, would be suspicious. And whoever was suspicious would follow up whatever it was that had aroused his suspicions. The U.S. counter-espionage service would get on the job, and pass it on to AS.

AS was U.N.'s counter-espionage organization, and Corvey was quite frankly afraid of it. If AS got a strong enough clue to justify real suspicion, he would be either definitely convicted or definitely cleared.

AS was so good that nobody knew much about it. Ryter hadn't been able to tell Corvey anything except that the only way to deal with AS was to keep clear of it. AS was a bogey man for every extraterrestrial operative. The only thing that was known about it for certain was that it was a rare event for anyone to find out anything about whatever AS was supposed to be guarding.

And AS was certain to be guarding the Rutledge defense tests.

This was why Corvey had to be very careful about Sandra. So far, no one had anything that could be turned into proof against him. Sandra very soon would, if he had anything more to do with her.

As it was, there was no question of his going away with her.

It was important, too, that he should shake Sandra off without giving her any hint of why he invariably refused the chances she offered.

HE knew where she worked. Instead of being a model, as she might well have been, she was a highly paid advertising copywriter, which meant that she had brains. Stupid people weren't paid Sandra's salary.

He was at the agency door when she came out. He fell into step beside her and took her arm. "Let's go and have another drink, Sandra," he said.

"But . . ."

"I think we ought to talk this Florida business over."

"Okay," said Sandra brightly.

Corvey made quite sure, this time, that the incident was no delusion. He concentrated on the ache in his head. That usually kept him anchored to reality.



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They went to the same cocktail bar, which was another anchor.

"Look, Sandra," said Corvey, with a grin. "It won't do."

Sandra didn't pretend to misunderstand.

"Going to Florida together, you mean? You've no right to say that. I haven't suggested anything . . ."

"You don't need to suggest anything. I know what's going to happen."

"Then you know more than I do."

"If I'm right, I don't want you to come. If I'm wrong, there's no particular point in your coming."

"*You* look," said Sandra. "You said you were spending a week in Florida. I said I was going to Miami for a week. That's all."

"Seriously, Sandra, I'm going for a rest. Now I ask you . . ." He left the sentence hanging.

Sandra laughed, taking it as a compliment.

"Believe me, I can be a relaxing companion, *too*."

Corvey shook his head. "With you around, how could I rest?"

"What you really mean, then, is that you just don't want me to be with you—isn't it?"

"Yes."

"All right. I can take a hint, eventually. Good luck, Ken."

"Good-by, Sandra."

"I never say good-by to anybody."

## III

CORVEY got away all right and checked in, late Saturday afternoon, at a quiet Miami hotel. No loss of appetite accompanied ritany — fresh air, good food, sunlight and rest were the things needed to combat it. At the hotel he selected, he could have them all.

He lazed all of Sunday and Monday. There were hallucinations galore, but they didn't matter. He spent most of the daylight hours on a veranda, half dozing, and neither the hotel staff nor the other guests disturbed him. He could answer any question sleepily and absently or not at all, and nobody was in the least suspicious.

He was seldom aware of his headache. Only on the three or four occasions during the day when he moved from his couch did he have to cope with the weakness in his limbs. He didn't have to move for meals — they were brought to him where he was. He had let it be understood that he was convalescing after an illness.

There were some very pleasant delusions, some indifferent ones, some which were unpleasant. They tended to be more pleasant when the victim wasn't fighting them — fighting them produced more anxiety hallucinations.



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Once he found himself back on Aram, on the river with Janet, his first girl.

On another occasion, he took a fanciful trip to Venus — very fanciful, since he had never been to Venus.

In one episode — thoroughly unpleasant — he had murdered Babs rather nastily and was helping a grim, vengeful Dave in an effort to discover the murderer. Dave always seemed just on the point of discovering the truth, and Corvey died a thousand deaths in his efforts to keep him off the right track.

The frequency and violence of the delusions, now that he was merely resting, showed the severity of Corvey's case. It might have been mild enough, properly treated, but Corvey had been doing the worst thing possible for the past month, preventing the fever from lifting. Ritany wasn't an illness that could be fought. The way to recover from it was to give in to it.

In another delusion, he wasn't a spy. He had been born on Earth and knew next to nothing about Aram.

That fantasy was very pleasant indeed. It was nice not to be a spy—to be an ordinary Earthman doing a job he liked.

But some of the conclusions to be drawn from this one were upset by the fact that other hallucinations, in which he was an ordinary Aramin living on Aram, were equally pleasant.

ON Tuesday evening Sandra turned up.

He had just re-oriented himself as Ken Corvey, survey reporter on the Rutledge *Star,* on vacation in Miami. Sandra strolled onto the veranda, wearing a sunsuit which indicated she must have been living close by. Her outfit was hardly street wear, even in Miami.

"I though you'd turn up sooner or later," he said.

She shook her head. "You had no reason to count on it, Ken. If a man plays hard to get long enough, he's liable to find himself with no takers."

"I'm not playing hard to get," said Corvey quietly.

She frowned. "You're married or something?"

"Something. Sit down and I'll tell you about it."

She dropped onto a pneumatic couch and lounged decoratively, waiting. Part of Sandra's appeal was her eagerness, her interest in what you had to say. No bored glamour girl, Sandra — she listened with gratifying attention, fell in with any suggestion that was made, enjoyed any entertainment that was offered.

"There are some jobs, you know," Corvey said, "that are



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more important than on[illegible] private life."

Sandra shook her head deadedly. "I don't believe it."

"You mean you wouldn't do such a job?"

She nodded. "Yes, I suppose that is what I mean. Are you telling me your job is one of th[illegible]m?"

"Yes."

"Your job on the *Star?*"

"No—another job."

"An undercover job?"

"Yes."

"Why tell me now, if not before?"

"Because now I think I can trust you."

Sandra's gaze locked frankly with his. "I like to be trusted," she admitted. "Go on."

"Have you ever left Earth?" Corvey asked.

"I've been on the Moon, that's all. Why?"

"Do you know much about the colonies?"

"You mean the deep-space worlds—Vokis, Ritchel, Watton and the rest? Not very much."

"How do you feel about these colonies, about which you don't know very much?"

"I thought you were going to tell me something, not ask questions."

"How do you feel about them?" Corvey insisted.

"I don't know. I don't know that I feel about them at all. I'd like to go there, of course—to all the worlds if I could. Seeing them, I might start to have feelings about them. Meanwhile—no. I've never been to New Zealand, either, and I haven't any feelings about New Zealand. It's a place I've seen pictures of, that's all."

"You don't feel any animosity toward Vokis, Ritchel and Watton?"

"Why should I?"

"Some people do — because they're not familiar places."

Sandra shrugged her shoulders. "There's no idea so silly nobody believes it—no prejudice, no dislike."

"Do you think you could even see the point of view of Vokis, Ritchel or Watton, when Earth had a different slant?"

SANDRA suddenly became more cautious. "I might—but probably not. Are you telling me you've some sort of scheme against Earth?"

"Not against Earth — not really."

"You're working for one of these worlds, anyway — and it may be against Earth?"

"Yes. What's your reaction to that?"

Sandra looked serious. "Even if I saw your point of view, Ken, I couldn't help you. Couldn't do anything but hinder you, in fact."

"Why?"



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"Because being a traitor is a terrible thing."

"I don't quite follow that."

"Traitors aren't nice people, even when they sincerely believe the country they help against their own is right. They're working against the country whose protection they're accepting. That, to me, is the vile thing about it. Spies aren't so bad."

"So what are you going to do?" Corvey asked.

He hadn't been looking at her, for it was much easier to carry on a reasonable discussion if he didn't. Now he turned and looked her straight in the face.

"I think," she said slowly, "I shall have to try and stop you."

"Even though I've told you this of my own free will, in confidence?"

She shook her head reluctantly. "You can't ask me to be a traitor, Ken. If this is a joke, it's a crazy one. If it isn't, I have to report what you've said, even though . . ."

"Even though what?"

"Well, you don't think it'll be easy for me, do you? I don't mean I'm going to turn you in. It would be better if you went away —and then, while you were away, I could tell the police what you've told me."

"If that's the best you can offer," Corvey said quietly, "I'm afraid I'll have to make better terms than you're offering me."

Before she could move, his shock had sunk deep in her diaphragm. She never recovered from the paroxysm, for he dropped beside her and neatly, efficiently, broke her neck.

He got that far, but the emotional shock snapped him right out of the delusion.

It had been quite real, for in most of the hallucinations he was unaware of the very existence of ritany. Only when he attacked Sandra had there been any unreal quality.

Still sweating, recovering from the shock, he considered the incident.

It probably wasn't far from what would actually happen if he spoke to Sandra like that. The delusions didn't need any element of truth about them, and prophetic delusions might be wholly untrustworthy. But generally, predictions were as correct as his own knowledge, and he saw no reason to distrust the warning in this incident.

The warning was — not to change his mind about Sandra.

There had been some danger of it—considerable danger—that he might have confided in her. And it was unlikely that she would ever support him against her own world.

But he had no time to ration-



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alize it any more, for he was in the middle of another delusion and he didn't know it was a delusion.

He was leaning on the rail of a yacht, a cool breeze on his face. It was night, and there were so many stars that the Moon was hardly missed. He knew, this time, that he had been born on Aram, and that this was Earth.

Over his shoulder came a familiar compound scent—crushed petals and mild pipe tobacco. He put one arm around Dave, the other around Babs and turned back to the rail.

"You haven't anything like this on Aram," said Babs challengingly.

He refused to argue. "I was just thinking that," he said. "When a Terran goes to Aram, he thinks it's beautiful. And so it is—with its greens and purples and browns, warm and hazy and fairylike. But the next day, the next month, the next year, Aram is just the same—while Earth has always something new to show you, something different."

"Every time we talk about Earth and Aram," said Dave in that slow, thoughtful way of his, "you seem to prefer Earth. Have you become a naturalized Terran, Ken?"

Corvey didn't answer for quite a while. His arms were still in close, companionable contact with Babs and Dave—who would always, to him, represent Earth. Dave was solid, slow, sympathetic. If one thought in symbols, Dave would be the stolid but shrewd peasant who was still the backbone of Earth's humanity. Babs was impulsive, always in a hurry, yet just as ready to help as her husband. She symbolized the pushing, frenetic life of the great cities, something not very familiar to the colonies.

"I think," he said at last, "that intellectually I prefer Earth all the way, but emotionally I'm still an Aramin."

Babs squeezed his arm affectionately. "That's a good answer," she said warmly. "I hate people who get too big for their own people."

## IV

WEDNESDAY, Thursday and Friday passed easily and pleasantly. The hallucinations became thinner—quite often Corvey would dream a vivid dream, but know it was a dream.

Saturday wasn't so good, for he was due to return the next day to finish an article for Monday's paper. He had to face two things. The first was that the ritany wasn't gone, that once he went back to fighting it, he might have more trouble with it. The second was that, when he got back to



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Rutledge, he would again be an Aramin agent, working against Earth.

He had tried to justify himself to Sandra in his delusion. He was working not against Earth, but for his own world.

It was a distinction without a difference.

A spy had no control over the use to which the information he stole was put. He was a thief, no less, a thief of valuable information. He took it back and gave it to his employers. It might be used purely defensively, which was legitimate. It would do Earth no harm for Aram to know and copy Earth's defensive setup.

But defense often led to offense, information about safeguards enabled more deadly weapons to be made, more deadly weapons sometimes led to a test, and the test was sometimes called war.

Corvey knew very well that, in the end, he would do what he had been sent to do. But that didn't enable him to stop thinking about it with misgivings.

He had become a spy because of false ideas about the job—ideas which he soon found to be false. When he did, he didn't give up the job, any more than stage-struck girls, when they found the theater wasn't quite what they thought it was, or writers, when they found their first book wasn't a best-seller, or violinists, when they found they weren't destined to be concert soloists. Like them he plodded on, his illusions gone, or almost gone, doing a job which still retained just a thread of the glamor it had had for him.

He went on being an agent from Aram because he couldn't see himself being anything else.

SATURDAY evening, Sandra really did appear.

When he saw her, he was in the grip of no hallucination. But he checked with himself again and again before he believed in her reality. He pinched himself, he scanned rapidly back over the day, he oriented himself—and by the time Sandra was within speaking range, he knew she was really there.

In addition to the pleasure of seeing her and the knowledge that he must mean a lot to her to cause her to chase him so shamelessly, there was a certain cool curiosity about how this real meeting would compare with the imaginary one. In one respect it was certainly going to be different—he wasn't going to tell her he was a spy.

She strolled onto the veranda, in the same way, and in a similar costume. But Corvey didn't make the same brash opening. This time he waited for Sandra.

"I came to bring you back,"



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she said with a smile and dropped on the pneumatic couch, precisely as she had in the delusion.

"Tonight?" he exclaimed.

"No, tomorrow."

"Then why come tonight?"

She shrugged and smiled again, but said nothing.

"I don't get it," he said. "I used to think you went for me only because I wouldn't go for you. But it can't be just that."

"I don't know either," Sandra admitted. "I should have given you up completely, long ago, and I don't know why I haven't. Partly, it's because I'm pretty sure you're not as indifferent to me as you pretend."

"There's no secret about that," said Corvey. "How could I be?"

Sandra frowned. "You're not married or something?" she asked —exactly as in the hallucination.

He shook his head. "Let's say, instead, I'm sick."

She looked up quickly. "Sick —is that it? You mean there's something permanently wrong with you?"

"In a way, yes." Having been born on Aram was the same as having something permanently wrong with him as far as Sandra was concerned.

"So sick that you've decided never to get married?"

"That's so."

"Who said anything about marriage?"

She held her arms out to him. That he was able to resist such a temptation was a great surprise to Corvey. His opinion of himself went up—for resist it he did.

Sandra sighed and dropped her arms. "Oh, well," she said. "I don't often talk about myself—it's the only thing I'm shy about."

She picked at the cushion under her, looking down her arm at her long fingers. "I don't know what's wrong with you, Ken," she said, "but there's certainly something wrong with me. I should never have been born. Having been born, I shouldn't have lived —a hundred years ago, I wouldn't have. Fifty years ago, I'd have died while still a child. Even as it was, they just barely kept me alive, but life was about all they could give me."

CORVEY stared at her incredulously. She was lean and clear-skinned, not only a beautiful girl but a perfect female physical specimen. There wasn't a flaw anywhere.

"No," she admitted, sensing his gaze, "there isn't much wrong with me now. Given time, doctors can work miracles. They don't even need a strong constitution to help them — they give you the strong constitution first, then build on it. But that takes a long time.

"I never was a child, in the



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normal sense. From the moment I was born, I was a patient. I didn't walk until I was seven. I was thirteen before I could run. Not until I was sixteen—seven years ago—could you say I had normal health."

HE had to check again to make sure Sandra was really telling him this. He had never remotely suspected such a background in Sandra's life—though, now that he knew about it, it made sense.

"I was trained," Sandra went on quietly, "from the first moment I could see, hear and think, that my body meant pain. Or if not pain, a constant, nagging discomfort. I never felt really well until I was eleven, and for five years that was intermittent.

"I'm not complaining. I'm the luckiest girl alive that now I'm strong, healthy and pretty. I'm as happy as any girl I know, and with more reason. I'm just telling you about the contrast, the change in me. While I was an invalid, I had a good education—but the thing I was surest of, from my own experience, was that my body could never, never give me any pleasure.

"Maybe now you can understand me better. At sixteen I learned to swim. I was so delighted I'd have swum all day if there hadn't been walking, too. Can you imagine how glorious it is to walk for miles and miles and never get tired, remembering when you had to stop and rest half a dozen times going around the block? Running was even better. When you're a perfect running machine, sprinting is sheer ecstasy—particularly if you have vivid recollections of how once all you could do was totter along, lungs laboring and a pain in your side.

"There were thousands of things, either things I'd never been able to do before or things I'd done painfully, at low efficiency, with no pleasure at all. Dancing—they had to stop me doing that for a while, I got so excited about it.

"And men — almost at once, kissing, cuddling and affection. My body had been a heavy liability for sixteen years. Now it suddenly and wonderfully became a glorious asset."

She met his gaze defiantly for a moment, then looked down again and went on more quietly. "When I'm a little older, I'll become better balanced. I've known the mental pleasures and the physical pleasures and, in a few years, I'll strike a balance between them. Meanwhile, the physical pleasures are still too new for me to have much time for anything else. Do you understand?"



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HE didn't answer, somehow aware she still had something to say. Presently she said it.

"One other thing—I told you I should never have been born. That was my parents' fault. I never knew either of them and perhaps it's as well. I hate them. They're the only people I ever learned to hate and it took a long time—years of pain.

"There aren't many people left whose heredity is weak enough to produce the creature I was. They should never have married, especially each other. And if they did, it was a crime to have children. Understand what I mean when I say I'll never get married?"

"There's no reason . . ." Corvey began.

"I know what you're going to say. Quite a lot of people get married although they can't have children, but I certainly never shall. Though I might, if I knew the man concerned wasn't keen on having children either. But I'd think more than twice before I did."

Corvey nodded. "I understand. Thanks for telling me this, Sandra."

He considered confiding in her, as she had confided in him. But once more he decided against it. A line from a song ran crazily through his brain—*Heaven can't match you—and I'm not a statue.*

He bent and kissed her, very gently. He was thinking how much better the end of the real incident was than the end of the hallucination, in which he had killed her.

BACK in Rutledge, Corvey soon found the answers to the three most important questions he could think of were yes, no and yes-and-no.

Was he going to have access to secret material when the defense tests started? *He was.*

Was he free of ritany and the worry, discomfort and extra difficulty it caused? *He was not.*

Was Sandra going to leave him alone?

That was the yes-and-no. Because there were really two questions, two desired answers. He wanted Sandra to leave him alone, yet he didn't. In fact, it became a question not of what Sandra did, but of what *he* did.

He found himself, many times a day, thinking of Sandra quite involuntarily and, at the end of the day, missing her perceptibly more. He was falling in love with the girl, there wasn't a doubt of it, and there seemed to be nothing he could do to stop it. He remembered, quite well but with complete puzzlement, a time when he had known Sandra and yet hardly ever thought of her.

He didn't see Neave until



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Monday. Neave detailed his part in the defense-test coverage.

"I've done my best for you, Ken," he said. "You know what defense officials are like where security is concerned. They wanted us to present glowing reports without being told anything. But I got what I wanted, apart from you, without much trouble. We argued about you for quite a while."

He paused for encouragement. Corvey gave it to him.

"Security wanted to give me their own survey reports. I said we used our own or none at all. They said they'd supply you with figures. I said that then you wouldn't be able to draw any conclusions except the ones they wanted you to draw. That was just what they wanted, but they couldn't very well say so. They said . . ."

He detailed with considerable self-satisfaction the whole course of the negotiations, ending, as he told it, in a complete victory for himself. Corvey congratulated him warmly.

Survey reporting was still fairly new, and every survey reporter on a newspaper had to make sure, as a first step, that his superiors understood something about the method. In a case like this, Corvey could accomplish nothing unless Neave understood his problems and did all he could to resolve them. So Corvey didn't mind giving Neave a little soft soap if he wanted it.

WHAT Neave had won for him was permission to go anywhere and ask anything—virtually an *open sesame* to the whole defense test program.

He couldn't have asked for more. There was nothing more to ask for.

Since he wasn't quite free of ritany even in the best possible conditions, it wasn't to be expected that it would leave him alone when he returned to work. And it didn't. In fact, while the hallucinations came less frequently than they had before he went away and the headache and fever were less, the lighter, easily-seen-through delusions deepened once more.

He tried to cover himself in advance by discreetly warning everybody that he would be working very hard in the next week or two, and was liable to be very absent-minded. Unfortunately, he had never been absent-minded before. People who weren't very observant were prepared to accept this story—observant people, or people who were really interested in him, like Dave, Babs and Jim Neave, looked incredulous at the suggestion. However, it was the best he could do.



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Those last twenty-four hours he'd spent in Florida with Sandra had been quite perfect. She was a great person to be with, ready to respond to anything, demanding nothing—quite unselfish, devoid of egotism. She could talk about anything. During her fifteen years as an invalid, she had learned something about everything.

She was that extreme rarity, the sensualist who understood that sensuality was only a small part of living.

HE didn't see her Monday or Tuesday, by a supreme effort. Wednesday, he lunched with her, took her to a show in the evening and naturally took her home afterward.

Quite by chance the conversation took a turn which showed him some of her views on the Earth-colonies question. The wine she offered him at her house—it was a house, not an apartment, as he'd expected—was colonial, and as they sipped, they talked about the colonies.

"Colonial politics are often pretty hard to follow," Sandra observed. "Sometimes you'd almost think they were afraid of Earth."

"So they are," Corvey said. "I once knew a colonist pretty well, and from his point of view every colony is a little afraid of Earth."

"But why?"

"Because she's so strong. Because Earth could crush any colony like an insect."

"That's nonsense," Sandra declared.

"Oh, no—it's true."

"I don't mean it isn't true—it's the idea that's ridiculous. You might as well say everyone on the Moon should be terrified, because Earth could blow it to atoms without even sending up a manned ship."

Though he didn't want to put himself in the position of arguing the colonies' case, Corvey felt bound to say, trying to remain judicial, "That's a different matter, Sandra. The Moon is almost part of Earth."

"And aren't the colonies almost part of Earth, too?"

"No, they're independent worlds—or they could be. Independent, but never as strong as the parent world. Always an easy prey, if—"

"*If* Earth happened to want an easy prey. Ken, you don't believe this yourself, do you?"

"This fellow made a convincing case."

"Ken, surely your friend and his whole world and the other colonies aren't all suffering from paranoia?"

"Paranoia?"

"Well, what else can you call it, when their only reason for be-



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ing afraid is that Earth *could* destroy them—*if* she liked?"

THE question hung in the air and went on hanging. Corvey never really knew whether he ducked it or Sandra neglected to follow it up. It was about that time that the conversation became more personal.

It was Corvey who mentioned marriage again, tentatively, and impersonally, like the discussion on the colonies. Sandra discussed it in the same way.

She was a little less adamant than when she had expressed her views on getting married. Perhaps she would marry sometime, if she found someone who had some of the qualities of Corvey, and if she believed he really didn't care about not having children.

That was Wednesday.

Thursday, he examined what he had learned so far from the defense tests, fought no less than three minor battles with ritany and, although he didn't see Sandra, felt himself compelled to call her twice.

He hadn't learned much of Earth's defense potential in detail, but quite a lot in general. His Miami report to Jan Ryter, though it had been a hallucination, turned out to be very close to the facts. As he had guessed, Earth was so far ahead of his own world in technical development that there was no prospect of the gap being closed, even if he had been a technician and could take back all the technical details.

Earth was ahead, not with money in the bank, so to speak, not with talents buried in the ground, but with talents in active use. Earth's potential was in her men rather than in anything they had done. Aramin scientists, given access to the Rutledge tests, could go home and build weapons and defenses every bit as good as Earth's—and it wouldn't matter in the least.

For, in the time taken to bring Aram up to Earth's level, Earth would have forged ahead again.

It wasn't an encouraging report to have to make, but the essential thing about Corvey's report was that it should be sound, not encouraging.

He had called Sandra in the morning, and he called her again in the evening to cancel their date. He had to work at home as well as at the office while the tests were on. The trouble with survey reporting was that ninety per cent of the work was wasted.

Friday . . .

Though he didn't know it at first, Friday was *the* day. There was nothing he could have done about it anyway. Everything was set to come to a focus at one point, and the point was Friday.



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FRIDAY MORNING. The defense tests were run in sections. It was an open secret that Rutledge was being used for some military maneuver or other. Precisely what was supposed to be unknown to anyone except the Army, the Air Force, the Space Navy, Washington, U.N., Securrity, the F.B.I. and "carefully screened units of the press." This last designation included, apparently, everybody in Rutledge who wasn't already included under the other heads, for everybody in Rutledge knew that the military maneuver was a complete test of all land-based defenses against any known form of attack from space.

On Friday, the main item was reaction time. The initial stimulus for which every warning system was designed was taken for granted. The lag before retaliation took place was measured and correlated with every other lag — the amount of damage which would have been done in the meantime—the time a human being, rather than an automatic warning, needed to react—everything else it seemed worth while correlating it with.

At eleven A.M. Corvey was standing in an open, empty space with about a score of other journalists and observers, two miles out of Rutledge. In front of them, 200 yards away, was something which looked like an old-fashioned howitzer, manned by half a dozen men and girls. There were as many women as men in defense. To the left, 300 yards away, was the radar post.

Someone spoke to Corvey, but it didn't seem to matter. He was gloomily aware that many defense experts on Aram would have given their right arms to see the things he was seeing and would see. Unfortunately, only a survey reporter could have such opportunities—and as a survey reporter, he wasn't trained to understand more than a fraction of the significance of the things he saw.

There was sudden movement at the radar post. A few seconds later, the spark of activity jumped the gap and the howitzer crew leaped about like flies. The blunt point of the machine swung around and up in one movement, and light stabbed from it. That part of it was rather an anticlimax. The light was only faintly brighter than the daylight it had to pass through, and gave the impression of a nearly exhausted battery.

There was a sudden, startling sound — a crack which was not loud but curiously vicious. With it was a faint stirring of the still air. A vacuum only a foot or so in diameter but eight hundred miles long was being filled—or



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rather, had been filled almost as it was being created—and these were the after-effects.

A long moment of tension, as if everyone were waiting for the plop of a penny dropped down a well.

Then a speck appeared and became a ship, dropping. Again someone spoke to Corvey unintelligibly—his eyes and everyone else's were on the ship. It grew incredibly slowly, though it must be falling out of control — the howitzer crew was paying no further attention to it, apparently satisfied that it was no longer a menace. The radar crew was still busy, however, tracking it.

SOMETHING seemed oddly familiar about the ship. Even before he could have known, Corvey was straining his eyes, hoping his wild guess was wrong.

It wasn't — the ship was an Aramin cruiser. It came hurtling down, spinning, its rear section misshapen. It struck about a mile away and was hidden for a moment in a cloud of flying earth and stones.

"*Mr. Corvey!*" came a sharp, insistent bark. "I must ask you to come and see Captain Swan."

With a start, Corvey turned. His eyes took in nothing but a uniform, then flicked back to the wrecked Aramin ship.

There was no ship. There had never been any ship at all.

He had been embroidering on the test. Vaguely, he was aware that the officer beside him had been trying to attract his attention for some time, without success.

"Sorry," he said. "I was working something out."

The other spectators were staring at the two of them. His trance must have been deep and puzzling. The officer beside him was red-faced, nervous, yet adamant.

"Sure," Corvey said. "Where is this Captain Swan?"

He was led across to the radar unit. He tried to dissolve the appearance of being a prisoner under guard, but without much success. The correspondents chattered as he was led away, and his escorting officer kept dropping a step behind, his hand rather melodramatically thrust into his pocket.

It was difficult to decide which attitude to assume, the indifferent or the indignant. Meanwhile, he pretended not to notice that he was in effect a prisoner.

His escort asked him to stand aside while he talked to Captain Swan, watched him closely while he did so, and generally made it quite obvious that Corvey was suspected of something pretty serious.

Corvey made up his mind. He strode forward. "What is this?"



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he demanded. "I'm Kenneth Corvey of the Rutledge *Star*—a dozen people here can swear to that. And if you want my authorization . . ."

"That's not the question, Mr. Corvey," said Swan bluntly. He was a brusque, neat little man. "It seems there were several attempts made to attract your attention, without success. I'm told you were in some sort of trance for at least four minutes. Have you any explanation?"

"I've given it already," Corvey retorted. "I'm a survey reporter —that means a big proportion of my work is mental arithmetic, so to speak. This requires extreme concentration—"

"I understand that, Mr. Corvey. But it seems your concentration, as you call it, was too deep and impenetrable for any such straightforward explanation. I feel sure there must be some—some further explanation."

"What, for heaven's sake?" Corvey demanded, allowing himself to sound a little angrier. "Is it a crime not to speak when I'm spoken to?"

"If you don't cooperate with us, Mr. Corvey," said Swan distantly, "you will find our cooperation with you will rapidly cease."

"How *can* I cooperate with you? What do you want? Of what crime am I accused, and what



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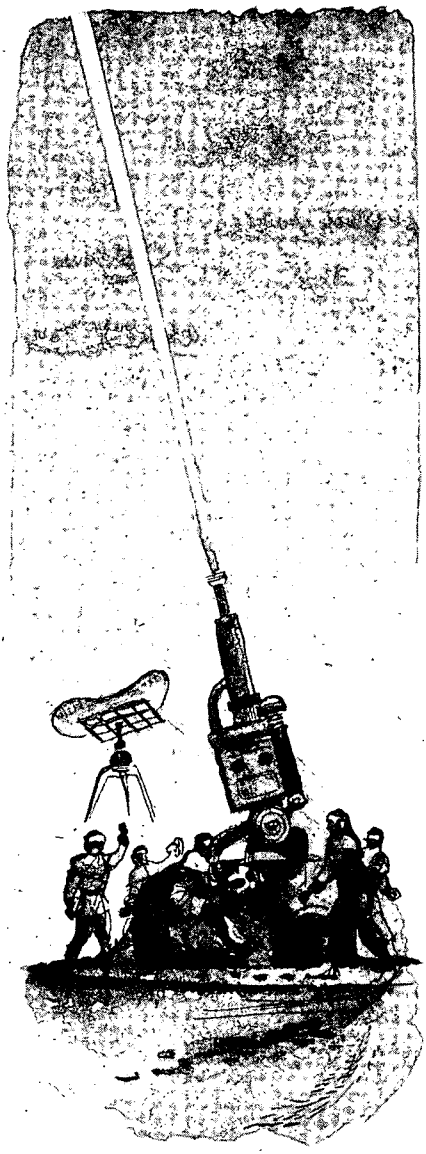
will you recognize as a defense?"

Swan began to realize his position was weaker than he thought, was weakening further. In a more propitiating tone, he said, "You realize how careful we have to be, Mr. Corvey, and you know yourself how thoroughly all observers have been screened. We must investigate *everything* we can't understand, and this trance of yours —it is possible, say, that you've been telepathically tapped, or that some post-hypnotic suggestion has been planted, or . . ."

"Captain Swan," said Corvey firmly but not angrily any more, "I realize that you must be careful, but surely that doesn't mean fanciful. I've offered you a perfectly reasonable explanation for something which doesn't seem in the least strange to me. You don't know how reasonable it is, unless you've heard the noise that goes on outside the office where I have to work. Now, would you like me to write down for your perusal some of the lines of investigation I covered mentally?"

With still less conviction, Swan said, "You know we don't suspect you, Mr. Corvey. It's just a matter of checking. Would you submit to a brief test? It's simply to establish—"

"No," said Corvey. He hated to have to say it, but there was no telling what a test might show. If they simply stuck a thermome-





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ter in his mouth, they would start to ask awkward questions. If they had a skilled lie-detector operator, they would get some very interesting answers.

"Oh?" said Swan, with a rapid return to his earlier manner. "Why not, Mr. Corvey?"

And though Corvey didn't hesitate and gave no outward sign of diminished confidence, he knew that from now on he was going to be less and less convincing.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON. Corvey left the Security office cleared and puzzled. He had submitted to some tests and refused others, and the two men he saw—interrogators in quite a different class fom Captain Swan—seemed satisfied. But he knew that those two would seem precisely as they wished to seem, quite independently of what they might think.

He guessed that he was strongly suspected and would be very closely watched, indeed, from now on. It was quite possible, from the way he had been treated, that he had been suspected all along, that Security Headquarters was rather annoyed with its own low-level operatives for pulling him in.

It even occurred to him that, possibly, some close associate of his—Babs, Dave, Jim Neave or Sandra—was watching him, had been watching him from the start.

At any rate, from now on he couldn't afford to do anything outside the normal requirements of his job. AS might suspect him slightly, strongly or with complete certainty. There was little or no possibility that he was not suspected at all.

He hadn't completely failed by any means. He would continue to have access to secret information, would be permitted to observe many of the further defense tests. But he would be trusted with nothing which really mattered from now on.

When Dave and Babs met him just outside the Security office, his suspicion that they were AS operatives heightened. However, it would be stupid to give any hint of that.

"Say, what's this?" Babs asked, concerned. "Security called us a while back about you. But it's all right now, isn't it?"

"It's all right," said Corvey easily. "Security's checking everyone about half a dozen times while these . . . but maybe I shouldn't say anything about what's going on just now, for officially nothing's happening at all."

"Oh, can it, Ken," said Babs. "You needn't start being supercautious with us. We gave you a magnificent character — I think you ought to stand us a drink, as



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a small token of your appreciation."

Corvey stood them a drink. Whether they were in AS or not didn't make much difference to his liking for them. After all, he had been deceiving them the whole time he had known them. He could hardly complain if they'd been deceiving him, too.

Sandra darted into the bar and kissed him in relief at the sight of him. She ignored Babs and Dave.

"Thank goodness!" she said breathlessly. "The way they talked to me over the phone, I thought you were in jail for life, if not just until they shot you. Will you excuse us, folks? Thanks."

She swept him away to the other corner of the bar, where Babs and Dave couldn't hear what they were saying.

"Tell me, Ken," she said seriously. "Did they let you go because you're not a spy or because they couldn't prove it?"

Things had changed since the last time he considered telling her the truth. "Neither," he said coolly. "I think they know I'm a spy, but they're waiting to see what I do."

"You *are* a spy?" she asked quietly.

"Yes. Oh, a most unspectacular spy. Not like the dashing spies of romance. I'm not here to steal the plans of secret weapons, just to get a general idea of Earth's potentialities."

"For whom? The highest bidder?"

The bitterness of her question hurt him, though it was only to be expected.

"No," he said. "For my own world—Aram. And not for offensive purposes. There's no question of Aram ever—"

"There never is," Sandra retorted, not angry but bitterly disappointed. "It's never anybody's hand that fires the shot. Nobody ever wants to fight. Every battle that was ever fought was fought in self-defense, apparently."

Corvey sighed. "I know. Study history and you find . . ."

It stopped just there, for no reason, and Babs and Dave were staring at him. He knew it was a repetition of the morning's hallucinatory incident.

HE was in the cocktail bar all right, with Babs and Dave—that part had happened. But the arrival of Sandra, like the fall of the Aramin ship, had been superimposed, and he had gone dead to all intents and purposes, judging by his friends' expressions.

People returning to consciousness often *do* ask, "Where am I?"—fatuous though it may be—because the first seconds of interrupted awareness are seldom



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characterized by notable alertness and perspicacity.

Dave spoke before he could think of anything else to say. "That's what happened this afternoon, isn't it?" he asked shrewdly.

There was no use denying it. Corvey nodded. "I know about it," he said. "It doesn't worry me, and it is temporary. But it's not an easy thing to explain."

"I can understand that," Dave agreed.

"Say, what is this?" Babs asked. "Periodic trances? How and where did you pick them up?"

"I've been trying to explain that all afternoon," said Corvey wearily. "Mind if I take a rest now?"

"Well, sure," said Dave slowly. "But there's a difference now, Ken. Security organizations are never exactly sympathetic. We are. Like to try us?"

If they were AS agents, they knew about him. If they weren't, they were just Dave and Babs, his friends. If he refused to say anything, they were capable of working out what he was refusing to say.

He was finished anyway. Apparently this was going to go on happening, the gradual merging of a real incident into ritanic hallucination, with trance instead of the absent-minded, automatic behavior which previously had enabled him to get by without arousing suspicion. When that had been the case, carrying on had been risky but not impossible.

Now it was impossible. He hadn't seen it when he left the Security office, but that had been before the second trance. Trances like this were not part of the normal case-history of ritany. Quite possibly, ritany took a different course on planets other than Aram. If more trances were to be expected, he would have to be content with what little he had learned already, go into hiding, and leave Earth with his job indifferently done — but alive, instead of carrying on until, inevitably, he was arrested.

"All right," he said quietly. "I'll take you up on that. Does what Dave say go for you, too, Babs?"

"Of course," she said. "Shoot." She leaned forward eagerly, intuitively aware that what Corvey said was going to be interesting.

"I've got a fever," Corvey said, "which identifies my world, which isn't Earth. That's why I've had to fight the fever, couldn't admit it, couldn't take sick leave. If I had, it would soon have been discovered that I'm not a Terran as I pretend, that my whole history is false—that, in fact, I could only be here as a spy."



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IN several delusions he had admitted to Babs and Dave or to Sandra, in one way or another, that he was a spy. This time, the incident being real, he checked it and found it true. He was sharing his secret with someone at last.

"You're working for another world against Earth?" asked Dave quietly. Babs caught her breath.

"Not exactly. I . . ."

"We can't help you, Ken," said Dave in the same quiet tone. "I'm sorry if I led you to think we could. I didn't believe you could possibly be—"

"Don't make excuses, Dave," Babs cut in. "It was an offer to a friend and I hope Ken's still that. But, Ken, you should have known we weren't traitors. Look—let's forget these last few things were said, shall we?"

Corvey nodded wearily. They were reacting much as Sandra had in the first hallucination—the way decent people, patriotic without being fanatic about it, would act—he supposed.

"I think we'd better go," said Babs, getting up. "We certainly won't give you up, Ken. But we can't help you and we'd better not talk about this at all. If we—when we see you again, I think we should ignore today altogether . . ."

But when she said that, she knew and Corvey knew they wouldn't see him again unless, perhaps, as witnesses at his trial.

Corvey tested the whole incident for reality once again and found it solid. But everything else was falling apart at the seams.

He should have known how Babs and Dave would react. Yet what did it matter, since Security was so close behind him anyway?

Babs and Dave, he was now certain, were not AS agents. He was also certain that they could be trusted—they wouldn't give him up. What he had to do was get under cover. Now, tonight.

He shouldn't even have thought of Sandra, but he did.

He wanted to go and see her, to find what she would say—*really* say—whether it would be the same as Babs' and Dave's reaction. For a while, he tried to convince himself that since he was on the run anyway, as of now, it made no difference, his calling Sandra on the way.

But he wasn't sufficiently blinded by love to be able to believe that.

No, he couldn't afford to see Sandra, even to say good-by.

## VI

FRIDAY EVENING. The last time he had been at Sandra's house he had been interested only



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in her, not the house. He had a little difficulty finding it again in the darkness.

It had taken him an hour or two to arrange things and, after that, he had walked most of the way to Sandra's house. He would have liked to call her, to make sure she wasn't out—but the phone might be tapped. That was another reason why he shouldn't go near her. If AS were really watching him closely, they'd know all about Sandra.

He found it at last, a small house in its own tiny patch of garden. He looked about carefully to make sure no one was watching the place—not that he had thought it likely anyone would be. Moderately satisfied, he still didn't go to the front door, but circled the house cautiously, found a lane which touched the rear wall at one point and climbed over.

There was light in a curtained upstairs window. Corvey had had certain training which he hadn't used for a long time, but which he had begun to call on again from the time he'd decided to go under cover. Within three minutes, he was inside the house and outside the door of the room where the light was on.

Thus ended his determination not to see Sandra again.

He tapped and said, "It's me —Ken."

There was a stifled shriek. Corvey waited. Presently Sandra's voice said challengingly, "If it's Ken, say something else."

He said something that proved he was Corvey. Then, when she sounded somewhat reassured, he slipped inside, flicking off the light-switch as he did so.

"What on earth . . .?" came Sandra's voice in the darkness.

He found her and, despite her surprise and puzzlement, she was prepared to throw her arms around him and kiss him readily enough. But she still wanted to know why he had sought her like that—he could feel the curiosity pulsing through her body.

"This place of yours would be the easiest job in months for housebreakers, darling," he murmured.

"Come on, Ken—give!"

He told her.

She didn't say a word until she was in possession of all the main facts. But she was still in his arms, and her body would have told him if what he was telling her shocked or disgusted her.

Twice in fevered delusions he had told her this—each time she had turned from him. It was natural that he should have hallucinations about her finding out.

NOW it was actually happening—and so far she hadn't turned from him in disgust. Her



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arms were still around him, her breath mingling with his.

"You're giving up the Rutledge defense tests altogether," she asked coolly, "and hiding out until you can be picked up and go back to Aram?"

"Yes."

"And—if it hadn't been for this, things might have been very different between us?"

"They certainly would."

"And you're still ill?"

"Yes. But when I'm lucid, I know what I'm saying, and I mean it."

"That isn't what I meant. I'm coming with you, Ken."

He caught his breath. That had been too much to hope for—he wasn't ready for it.

"That doesn't mean I agree with what you've been doing or would help you against Earth. I wouldn't."

He tightened his grip, but she avoided his lips. "Never mind that just now. Have you any plans—workable plans?"

"Oh, yes," Corvey said. "I could have done this for a long time, but I didn't when there was still a chance."

"Forget that. You can't expect me to be sympathetic because you've failed in an espionage job for some other world."

"Wait a minute, Sandra. Why are you coming with me?"

"Because I love you, fool! But that doesn't mean I love your job, or . . . Don't waste time arguing. What are we going to do?"

He released her, stepped back and snapped on the light. She blinked for a moment, then gave a startled cry.

The man in the room with her wasn't Ken Corvey. This man had lighter hair, held himself differently, had brown eyes instead of blue and a smaller nose. The differences were slight, but she would have passed this man in the street without a second glance.

"I see," she said, recovering herself. "Which is you?"

"Neither," said Corvey. Now his voice was different, too.

HE looked at her as he had never looked at her before—wondering how her appearance could be simply and significantly altered. He had some materials, in case he should have to change his own appearance again, but not a great deal.

He managed it in seventeen minutes, by darkening her hair and getting her to change its style while he made her mouth fuller and her cheeks thinner. She was startled at the latter operation, her hand going to her face.

"That ointment tightens your face muscles," he said. "Don't touch it. When it's dried, it'll last



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for twenty-four hours or so. There, you don't look much worse than usual, if quite different."

He didn't let her look at herself until she was dressed in clothes which he selected and modified with her help. When she did look in a full-length mirror, she gasped, horrified.

"I look *awful!*" she wailed.

"Not really. You just look different. Of course, those are clothes you'd regard as all wrong for you—I made them like that. People have a pattern of appearance, speech, walk, clothes. All you have to do to become a different person is to change the pattern. Just remember you're the girl in the mirror, not Sandra Reid."

Sandra locked up the house and left it without any signs of a hurried departure. She also dropped a brief line to her employers. They walked some distance, so that no cabby would remember picking up a man and a woman at Sandra Reid's house, then took a taxi to the airport.

By agreement, Corvey was telling her only the next step, so that, in the event of something going wrong, she wouldn't know his whole plan. If anything did go wrong, she would naturally go home. Corvey could always communicate with her there.

The next step, after the local airport, was a flight to any big airport. Sandra didn't know their destination from there.

CORVEY reflected, while he paid the taxi driver, that they would certainly be traced eventually to the airport, then to New York or San Francisco or wherever they flew. He would have to make sure the trail was much weaker from there, and quite untraceable from the next check point. His destination was Kingston, Jamaica, but he had to be quite certain he left no trail—Kingston was the last refuge of any Aramin agent on Earth.

They found the next plane was to New York, which suited Corvey well enough. Corvey booked passage under names he didn't even bother remembering—they weren't going to need them again. They went to the waiting room to spend the twenty minutes before the plane left.

And the first person Corvey saw when he followed Sandra inside was Jim Neave.

He paid no attention. Sandra, who didn't know Neave, was saying something which didn't matter, but she might easily switch at any moment to something which did. Corvey cut her off rudely, hoping she would guess why. She didn't immediately. She started and shot a surprised



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glance at him. To make sure she had a chance to think for a second or two before bursting out with something catastrophic, he hurried past her to look out one of the big windows at the planes, digging her warningly in the ribs while his body shielded her from Neave.

When she joined him at the window, she had clearly taken the hint. She was docile and quiet, taking her cue from him.

Corvey hadn't looked closely at Neave, but he was aware his boss was still watching him. That Neave was there looking for him was practically certain—he should have been at the office. The only question was whether Neave was an AS agent or merely someone who could identify Ken Corvey. The fact that he appeared to be alone suggested he was an AS agent. But he might not be as alone as he seemed.

Corvey's disguise was designed to defeat descriptions and photographs, not to fool anyone who knew him well. He didn't dare look at Neave. He was hoping Neave wasn't an AS agent for, if he was, he would know his job and have Corvey investigated.

Corvey took Sandra's arm and said in a voice which was not the one Neave knew, "Place stinks. Come on out in the fresh air."

Neave was at his elbow. "Excuse me, sir . . ." he began.

As Corvey turned and looked at him, he saw complete certainty come into Neave's face. Perhaps Neave, knowing something like this might happen, had carefully noted a tiny scar or irregularity on his face, something which even Corvey didn't know about. At any rate, there could be no further pretense.

CORVEY doubled Neave up with a stomach punch and chopped him behind the ear. The gun which was halfway out of Neave's pocket clattered on the floor. Corvey didn't take time to pick it up. He kicked it and sent it sliding along the floor under a sofa.

All the people standing about had seen the incident, or at least part of it. Corvey decided a bluff wouldn't pay. There was nothing for it but to run.

He seized Sandra's arm again and, from the rapidity with which she got off her mark, she seemed to have the same idea. They darted out to the concrete.

"All right, stand where you are," said a voice sharply.

Corvey didn't know quite what the danger was before it was removed. When he turned, a man was pitching forward, his gun flying from his hand, and Sandra was rubbing her leg.

*"Well done!"* Corvey gasped.



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"I don't know what you did, Sandra, but it was good."

They jumped on a luggage trolley and Corvey sent it trundling away from the brilliantly lit strip in front of the waiting-room windows.

"It would be futile to take up a plane, even if we could," Corvey said. "The thing to do is get back into town and get out by train or bus. That's the only—"

Two of the small fat tires of the trolley were shot out and it scraped to a stop with a final earsplitting scream of steel on concrete. Corvey didn't see where the shots came from, but the shooting was so precise and so obviously intended to stop them, without harming them, that he knew he and Sandra might just as well stay where they were and wait to be taken in custody.

Nevertheless, they did the natural thing and dashed for the edge of the field. It wasn't the first time Corvey had experienced the sensation of crawling physical terror which came with the knowledge that, at any moment, a bullet might tear through any part of his body, but he knew it was probably the first time Sandra had felt it. He was sorry he had dragged her into this.

There were still no extra lights, no signs of undue confusion, no hue and cry. Just Neave, the man outside and the two shots which had put the trolley out of action.

Sandra gasped suddenly, and Corvey turned his head to see her go down. Someone had made a neat football tackle on her.

He didn't see what happened after that, for something hard came down on his head and seemed to drive him into the ground like a stake.

FRIDAY NIGHT. Corvey opened his eyes a bit and saw Sandra's legs. There could have been worse awakenings — nevertheless, Sandra's legs were an irrelevance in the circumstances as he remembered them. He opened his eyes fully.

"With us again, Ken?" said Neave.

They were in a small office at the airport. Sandra was in an armchair, watching him. She didn't appear to be hurt. She smiled wryly as his gaze met hers. Neave was standing over him and, behind, were two other men.

Corvey didn't say anything. He was now completely in the power of AS. Anything they didn't know they could soon find out by the use of truth drugs. One good thing was that interrogation would show Sandra wasn't involved with him.

"We could put you against a wall and shoot you, of course," Neave said, "but we're not going



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to. I'll put you out of your suspense, Ken. First, as you probably know very well, we're going to drug you and find out all you know. Assuming that's no more than we expect, and that your assignment is what we think it is, we'll give you a short treatment and then you can come back on the staff of the *Star* in your old job.

"Wait a minute—don't let's have any misunderstanding. When I say you can come back, I mean you're coming back by order. We'll shoot you if you don't."

"You want me to work for you, for AS, in fact?" Corvey said.

Neave nodded. "That's it. And don't say you won't. That's a waste of breath and time."

Corvey marveled at the way Neave's manner stayed exactly the same, yet seemed much more effective now that he was an AS operative and not merely a feature editor.

"How about Sandra?" Corvey asked.

Neave shrugged. "We've already questioned Miss Reid. We've nothing against her. In fact, she's with us."

Corvey started. "All the time?"

"Yes, but not the way you mean. Aren't you going to take me up on the 'short treatment' I mentioned?"

"I can guess about that," Corvey said shortly. "You mean psychological treatment."

"Exactly. But hasn't it occurred to you that you may need it?"

CORVEY grinned without humor. "If I'm going to stay alive, I do."

"Not only that—you *do* need psychiatric treatment, Ken. It seems Miss Reid once told you about it, only she didn't know what she was saying applied to you."

"What are you talking about?"

"Paranoia. Like all colonials, you think Earth's against you. You're wrong. And after your treatment . . ."

"I know, I'll think what you want me to think after my brain's been tampered with."

Neave shook his head. "You still won't even admit it's possible," he said patiently. "I wish you would, Ken. It would make us all feel better. We don't shoot colonial spies, because we don't have to, and because they're not responsible. We just cure them and, after that, they're good AS agents. They disappear or report nonsense to their own worlds or they go back—under our protection, of course—and no doubt the colony concerned thinks we've done something terrible to them, because they've changed. Maybe



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you weren't told about that."

Sandra joined in. "Paranoia is a sort of inferiority complex, Ken," she said quietly, "and naturally the colonies tend to feel that way about Earth. You're not insane—only strongly prejudiced on one point. They'll take away that prejudice, that's all."

CORVEY looked from one to the other. He knew that what they said was false, that he was going to have an artificial devotion to Earth set up in him and have his love of Aram broken down.

But he couldn't stop them, anyway. And the way Sandra was looking at him showed that she hadn't changed her mind about him since she agreed to come away with him.

"All right," he said. "I'll admit it's possible, if it gives you any satisfaction. I suppose it's a pretty humane way to treat spies anyway—I've no complaints. I suppose AS knew about me all the time, since you were planted at the *Star* when I came?"

"We didn't know about you until just the other day," said Neave, "and we weren't sure until today. And I wasn't planted, Ken. You should know that. Think I'm an amateur feature editor? No, that's my job."

"What's your AS connection, then?" Corvey asked curiously.

"Same as yours—or as yours will be. I was once a colonial spy, too."

And suddenly Corvey understood the blinding efficiency of AS. Morally right or morally wrong—Corvey didn't know—Earth had and was going to continue to have the best counter-espionage system in the entire Galaxy.

AS was carnivorous. It swallowed the operatives of every world in the Galaxy except Earth and turned them into its own flesh.

It was a pretty good system.

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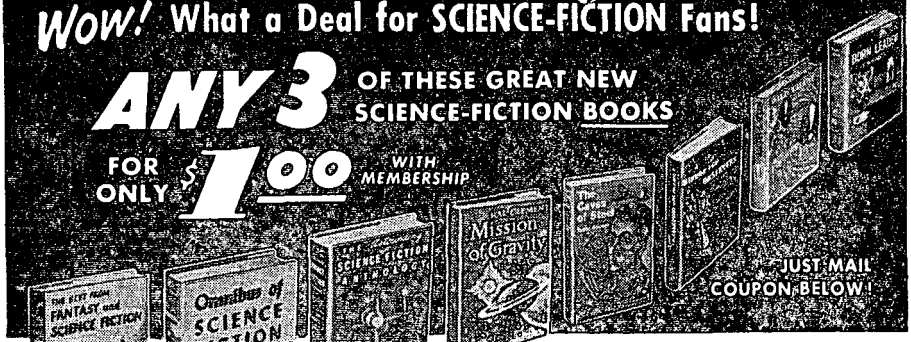


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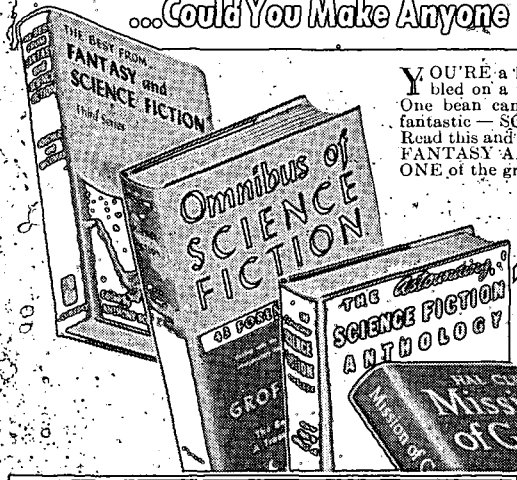


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